Antique Rugs of Kurdistan A Historical Legacy of Woven Art

James D. Burns









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The Kurdish people have a long and distinguished weaving tradition. These hardy nomads in their mostly mountainous homeland employed a colorful repertoire of traditional motifs in the rugs, bags, and covers that accompanied their migrational treks; while urban workshops, such as those at Sonqor, Senna, Garrus, and Sa'uj Bulagh, produced more elaborate rugs for tribal khans and for export. *Antique Rugs of Kurdistan* portrays a variety of weavings from all areas of "Kurdistan" prior to the twentieth century, with an examination of one hundred examples.

The book begins with an overview of the Kurdish people and their homeland, which cuts across a number of modern political boundaries: those of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, the countries of the Caucasus, and Syria. It then looks at the history of weaving in the rugged and frequently inaccessible mountains of this region as well as in the ancient plateau bastions. The effect played by Kurdistan's turbulent history – and the hard lifestyles of its people – on the quality and artistic ability of the weavers is also explored. The main part of the book comprises an examination of Kurdistan's seven districts, giving background information about the weavers who lived in each and the construction methods, colors, and designs that they used. Full-page color plates illustrate examples of weavings from each district, and a technical analysis is provided for each piece.

Twelve detailed maps show the locations of the different weaving areas and tribal groups, while over fifty archive illustrations provide fascinating context. An Appendix essay by the historian Mehrdad Izady charts the complex origins and history of the Kurds, which stretches back eight millennia. Shedding much new light on a little-understood area of weaving heritage, *Antique Rugs of Kurdistan* provides a long overdue introduction to and compelling insight into the lives, creativity, and woven art of the Kurdish people.






Contents

I have long been attracted by Kurdish weavings, and I have collected them for over forty years. Their bold designs are most appealing, as is their use of bright, vibrant colors. These weavings run the gamut from the coarsest tribal pieces, woven for warmth against the bitter cold of the mountains, to the finest products of urban workshops, designed for use by wealthy domestic or foreign patrons. This book will show examples of antique Kurdish weavings from all levels of production.

In an attempt to bring some order to the identification of old Kurdish rugs in general and my own collection in particular, I have divided Kurdistan into seven districts; this division was devised by the Kurdish scholar and historian Mehrdad Izady and was used in his seminal work, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (1992). The boundaries between these districts generally reflect the different geographic, political, and cultural boundaries within "Kurdistan," an area which is defined as where the Kurds constitute the majority of the inhabitants. As will be seen, however, the animal grazing zones of most of the nomadic Kurds spread out over more than one district or political boundary.

The main section of the book covers each of the seven districts in turn, giving examples of weavings from each alongside background information about the weavers who lived there and the construction methods, colors, and designs they used. The introductory text on each district is accompanied by a map indicating the main weaving areas. The maps show the locations of the various peoples in Kurdistan as they were known circa 1835, and placenames are similarly labeled. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries various political changes took place in the Near and Middle East which greatly affected

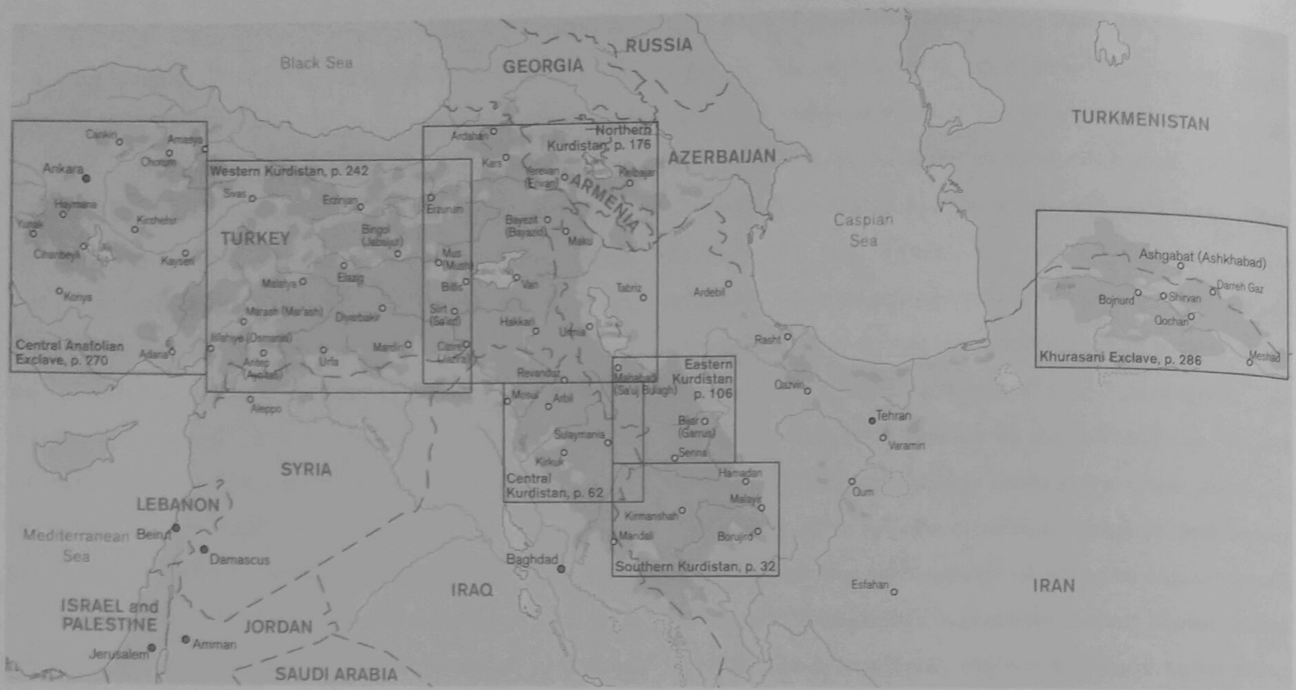
Kurdish tribes and urban groups, and thus Kurdish weaving. It seems appropriate, therefore, to orient the reader to a time before these political changes occurred; this is also a time that is closer to the era in which the weavings in this book were created, and before the art of weaving began to decline.

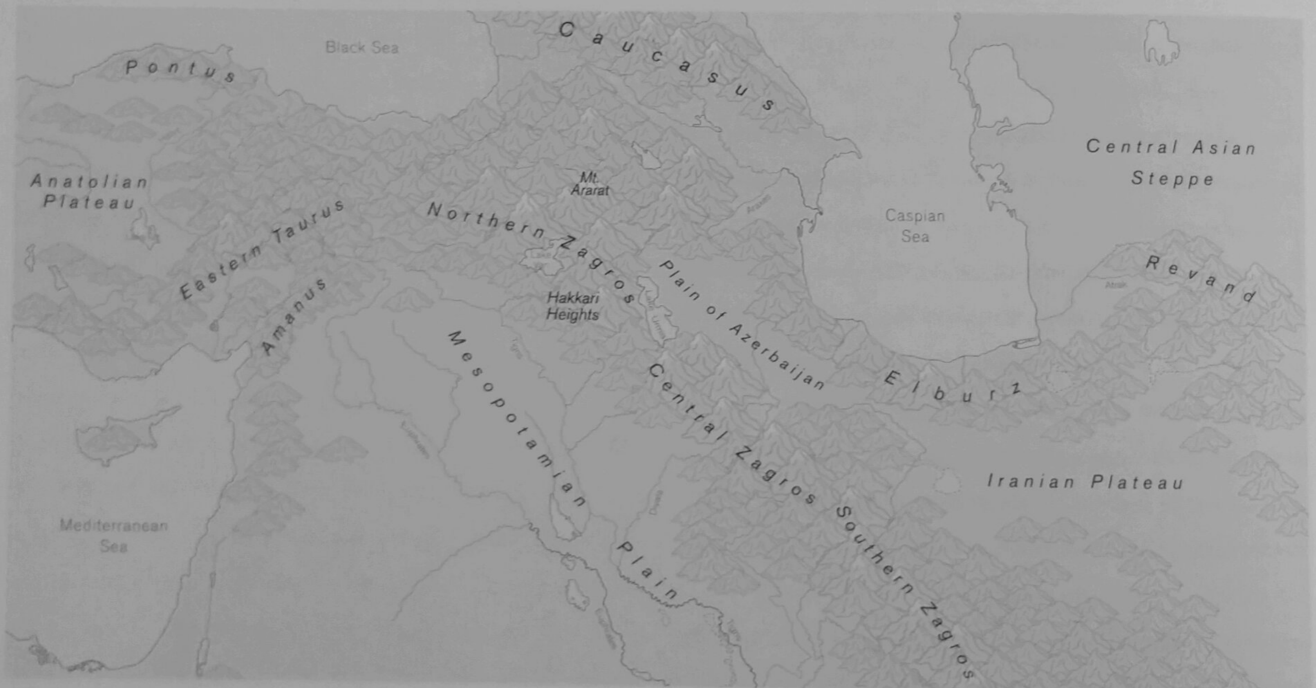
The spelling of placenames, ethnic groups, etc., is problematic in a region that has seen so many political changes. Where variant spellings exist, I have favored that which approximates to Kurdish use. The changes that have taken place in Turkish placenames are particularly complex. After 1925 the Turkish government changed the ancient names of many cities within their domains, and nearly all villages, rivers and mountains, to Turkish names, the rationale being that ethnically diverse historical names diverted the people from the concept of the new Turkish state. During the 1940s the names of many of these same cities were changed again, adding to the confusion.

This book draws predominantly on my own collection of Kurdish weavings. It is not intended as a comprehensive survey of the subject, as I only collect those pieces which appeal to my taste. Other examples important to the study of antique Kurdish weavings are no doubt scattered around the world, and it is my hope that this book will act as a primer that will stimulate the interest of my fellow rug collectors in finding, preserving, and further identifying these weavings. Time and research will be required to document and better understand this wonderful and provocative art.

I am indebted to several people who graciously shared their knowledge and time for the production of this work. Cyrus Habibi, who translated relevant portions of the *Tuhfa-i-Nasiri* (a nineteenth-century history of Eastern Kurdistan) and who provided information regarding his native city of Sa'uj Bulagh. Haydar Saribas, a weaver and restorer from Maras, who was helpful in identifying Kurdish weavings from the Malatya, Maras, and Antep areas of Turkey. Bill Eagleton, for his advice and assistance. Shireen Ardalan, who supplied historical information on her family, the princely house of Ardalan. Jalal Jaff, an elder statesman of the Jafs, who provided this author with information about the Jafs' economic history and weaving practices. Nuri Altuntas, who provided information regarding the kilims produced in Central Kurdistan. Michael Franses for his overview and aesthetic evaluations. Ian Bennett for editing some of the captions. Peter Saunders, who assisted with the analysis of the structures of the weavings, and Don Tuttle for his fine photography of the pieces. I want also to thank my research assistant Elizabeth Twiss for her patience and help in checking the sources and typing the manuscript.

I had the great good fortune of meeting Mehrdad Izady at the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. in 1993, when we appeared together on a panel discussing Kurdish weaving. Mr. Izady has an encyclopedic knowledge of his people, the Kurds, having taught Kurdish history at various universities and having published many articles and books. Although Mr. Izady is not himself a rug collector, he greatly appreciates the art of Kurdish weaving and encouraged me to publish this book. I am immensely grateful for his help in the preparation of the maps, for the extensive background information he provided on the seven districts of Kurdistan, and for the Appendix essay he has written on the origins and history of the Kurds.





top Map showing the seven districts of Kurdistan and approximate areas of Kurdish majority, circa 1835, in the context of the present-day Middle East.

above Map showing the mountain systems of Kurdistan and southwest Asia.

0 — 300 miles
500 kilometers

area with Kurdish majority (approximate)

modern international border



above **Map showing Kurdish independent kingdoms and autonomous principalities in 1835.**

BAYAZID independent kingdom or principality

Milan auntonomous vassal principality or khanate

international border

border of autonomous principality or khanate

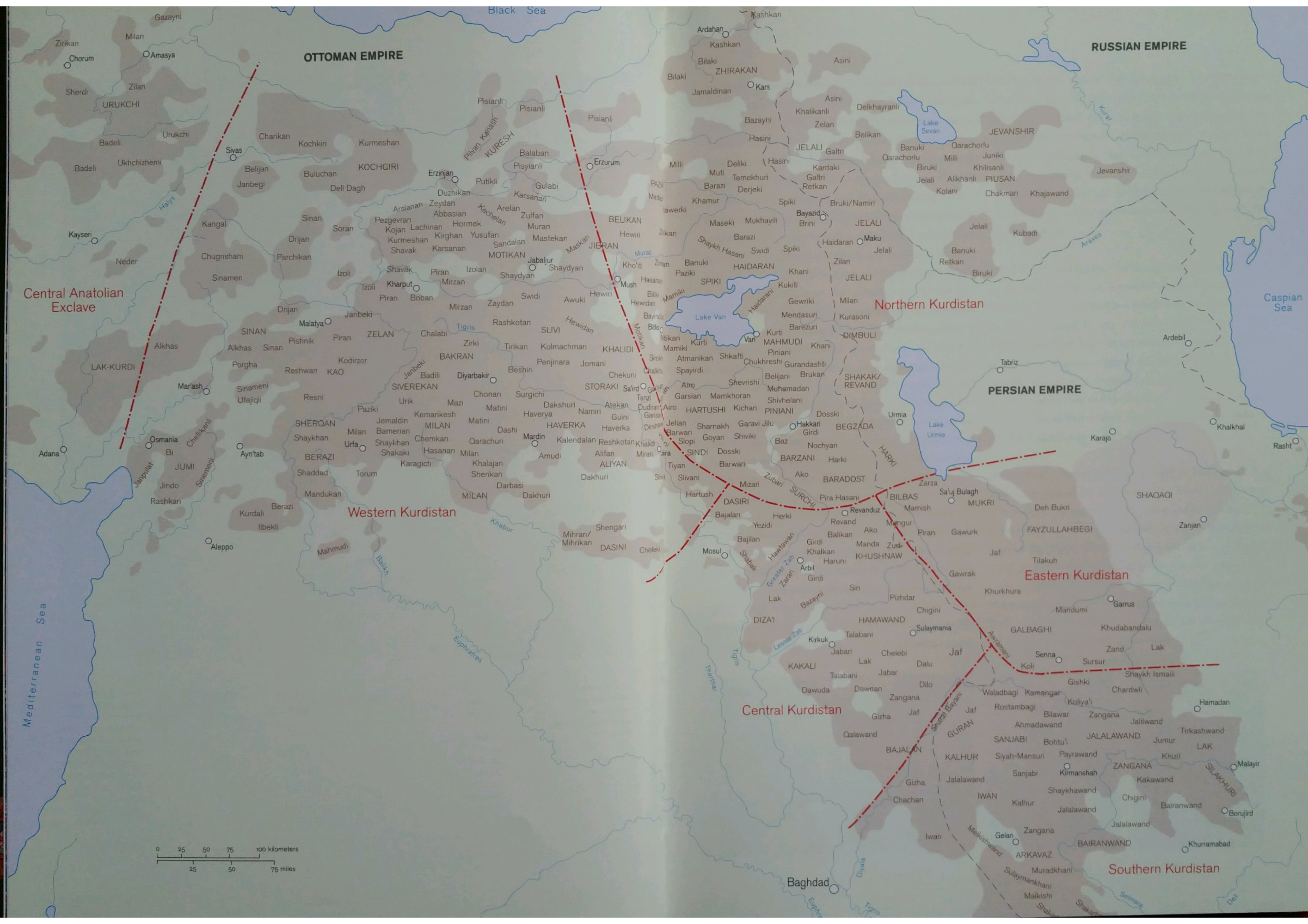
0 100 miles

150 kilometers

overleaf **Map showing the approximate location of Kurdish family clans and sedentary and pastoral tribes (except for the Khurasani Exclave), circa 1835, compiled from early nineteenth-century sources.**

ZHIRAKAN major tribal confederacy

Bilbkan clan or tribe



OTTOMAN EMPIRE
RUSSIAN EMPIRE
PERSIAN EMPIRE
Black Sea
Caspian Sea
Mediterranean Sea
Central Anatolian Exclave
Western Kurdistan
Northern Kurdistan
Eastern Kurdistan
Central Kurdistan
Southern Kurdistan
Lake Van
Lake Urmia
Lake Sevan
Halys
Tigris
Euphrates
Murat
Khabur
Balikh
Tharthar
Greater Zab
Lesser Zab
Diyala
Araxes
Kurar
Gazayni
Zirikan
Milan
Chorum
Amasya
Zilan
Sherdi
URUKCHI
Badeli
Urukchi
Ukhchizhemi
Sivas
Kayseri
Neder
Adana
Kangal
Chugrishani
Sinamen
LAK-KURDI
Alkhas
Mar'ash
Osmania
Bi
JUMI
Janpulat
Chellikanli
Sinemeni
Jindo
Rashkan
Ayn'tab
Aleppo
Kurdali
Ilbekli
Berazi
Charikan
Kochkiri
Kurmeshan
Beljjan
Janbegi
Buluchan
KOCHGIRI
Dell Dagh
Erzinjan
Sinan
Drijan
Parchikan
Soran
Izoli
SINAN
Pishnik
Piran
ZELAN
Malatya
Janbeki
Porgha
Reshwan
KAO
Kodirzor
Sinameni
Ufajiqli
Resni
Paziki
SHEROAN
Shaykhan
BERAZI
Shaddad
Torum
Mandukan
Urfa
Mahmudi
Pisianli
Pilvan
Kanash
KURESH
Balaban
Pisyianli
Putikli
Gulabi
Karsanan
Duzhikan
Arslanan
Zeydan
Abbasian
Arelan
Zulfan
Pezgevran
Kojan
Lachinan
Hormek
Kurmeshan
Kirghan
Yusufan
Shavak
Karsanan
Sandalan
Muran
Mastekan
MOTIKAN
Jabaljur
Shaydyan
Kharput
Izolan
Mirzan
Boban
Zaydan
Swidi
Awuki
Rashkotan
SLIVI
Chalabi
Zirki
BAKRAN
Tirikan
Kolmachman
Penjinara
Jomani
Badili
Diyarbakir
Beshiri
SIVEREKAN
Urik
Mazi
Chonan
Surgichi
Jemaldin
Kemankesh
Matini
Bamerian
MILAN
Shaykhan
Chemkan
Shakaki
Hasanan
Karagich
Qarachuri
Dashi
Mardin
Haverya
Dakshuri
HAVERKA
Namiri
Kalendalan
Amudi
Khalajan
Sherikan
Darbasi
Dakhuri
Mihran/Mihrikan
Shengari
DASINI
Cheleki
Erzurum
Pisianli
BELIKAN
Hewiri
Maskan
JIBRAN
Hewidan
KHALIDI
Chekuni
STORAKI
Sa'ird
Atekan
Guini
Haverka
Reshkotan
Alifan
ALIYAN
Mush
Khoiti
Zilan
Mamiki
Bitlis
Motikan
Ardahan
Kashkan
Bilaki
ZHIRAKAN
Jamaldinan
Kars
Asini
Khalikanli
Zelan
Delkhayranli
Bazayni
Hasini
JELALI
Galtri
Belikan
Milli
Deliki
Muti
Temekhuri
Barazi
Derjeki
Kardaki
Retkan
Khamur
Spiki
Bruki/Namiri
Bayazid
Brini
Maseki
Mukhayili
Swidi
Haidaran
Maku
HAIDARAN
Banuki
Paziki
SPIKI
Khani
Kukiti
Gewriki
Mendasuri
Barezuri
Kurti
Van
MAHMUDI
Piniani
Mamiki
Atmanikan
Shkafti
Chukhreshi
Gurandashti
Spayirdi
Beljani
Brukan
Shevrishi
Muhamadan
Shivhelani
Airo
Garsian
Mamkhoran
HARTUSHI
Kichan
PINIANI
Jelian
Sharnakh
Garavi Jilu
Barwari
Slopi
Goyan
Shiviki
Hakkari
Girdi
Dosski
BEGZADA
SINDI
Baz
Nochyan
BARZANI
Harki
Tiyan
Slivani
Barwari
Ako
BARADOST
Hartush
Mizari
Zubari
SURCHI
DASIRI
Bajalan
Pira Hasani
Revanduz
Herki
Yezidi
Bajilan
Shabak
Hawtawan
Mosul
Zarari
Arbil
Girdi
Khalkan
Haruni
Balikan
Revand
Manda
Zudi
KHUSHNAW
Lak
DIZA'I
Bazayni
Sin
Pizhdar
Chigini
HAMAWAND
Sulaymania
Talabani
Kirkuk
Jabari
Chelebi
Jaf
KAKALI
Dalu
Jabar
Dilo
Dawuda
Dawdan
Zangana
Gizha
Qalawand
BAJALAN
GURAN
Sharaf Bayani
Chachan
Iwan
Baghdad
Milan
Kurasoni
DIMBULI
SHAKAK/REVAND
Zilan
JELALI
Jelali
HARKI
Urmia
Tabriz
Zarza
BILBAS
Sa'uj Bulagh
Mamish
MUKRI
Mangur
Piran
Gawurk
Gawrak
Jaf
Khurkhura
Avramani
JEVANSHIR
Banuki
Qarachorlu
Milli
Juniki
Biruki
Khilisanli
Jelali
Alikhanli
PIUSAN
Kolani
Chakman
Khajawand
Jevanshir
Kubadi
Retkan
Biruki
Ardebil
Karaja
Khalkhal
Rasht
Deh Bukri
FAYZULLAHBEGI
Tilakuh
SHAQAQI
Zanjan
Mandumi
Garrus
GALBAGHI
Khudabandalu
Senna
Koli
Zand
Lak
Sursur
Shaykh Ismaili
Gishki
Chardwli
Waladbagi
Kamangar
Koliya'i
Rostambagi
Bilawar
Zangana
Jaliwand
Ahmadawand
SANJABI
Bohtu'i
JALALAWAND
Jumur
Tirkashwand
LAK
KALHUR
Siyah-Mansuri
Payrawand
ZANGANA
Khizil
Sanjabi
Kirmanshah
Kakawand
Hamadan
Malayir
SILAKHURI
Jalalawand
IWAN
Kalhur
Shaykhawand
Chigini
Bairanwand
Borujird
Jalalawand
Gelan
Zangana
ARKAVAZ
Melkishwand
Muradkhani
Sulaymankhani
Malkishi
BAIRANWAND
Khurramabad
Seimara
Dez
0 25 50 75 100 kilometers
25 50 75 miles

The Kurds are one of the world's least-known ethnic groups. Historically, Kurdish roots can be traced back to the dawn of antiquity. Kurdish territories are geographically in the heartland of the Middle East, and are consequently crisscrossed by some of the world's oldest land routes, such as the Silk Road. With a fast-growing population of around thirty million people the Kurds' mountainous homeland, if independent, would today be the world's thirty-first most populous country. In view of these factors, our dearth of knowledge and source material about the Kurds seems to be paradoxical. The reason for this paradox, however, is no mystery.

Kurds have been living the unenviable life of a fragmented and embattled nation for the past one and a half centuries. During that same period no part of Kurdistan – the historic land which the Kurds have been calling home for millennia – has had its own sovereignty.[1] In the absence of an independent state and the concomitant apparatus for producing basic reference materials on their history (such as encyclopedias, atlases, anthologies, art histories, and surveys), the facts about Kurdish people and their contribution to humankind's cultural legacy remain obscure – and contentious.

As related in the Appendix essay, the makeup of the Kurds is the product of five distinct civilizations. The cultures of these civilizations – the Halaf, the Ubaid, the Hurrian, the Aryan, and the Semitic/Turkic – resulted in layers of influences that have shaped their identity as well as their weaving traditions.

Since the Kurds do not comprise an independent sovereign nation, Kurdistan's borders can only be defined culturally.



Today the Kurds reside within the political boundaries of modern Iran, Iraq, Turkey, the Caucasus, Turkmenistan, and Syria. The Kurdish homeland of about 230,000 square miles (600,000 square kilometers) is approximately the same size as the combined areas of Germany and Great Britain, or the states of California and New York. There are also two large Kurdish exclaves, one in central Anatolia (Turkey) and the other in Khurasan (northeast Iran). The Kurdish homeland essentially consists of the mountainous area of the central and northern Zagros, the eastern third of the Taurus and Pontus, and the northern half of the Amanus ranges. The symbiosis between the Kurds and their mountains has been so strong that they have become synonymous: the Kurds' home ends where the mountains end. Kurds as a distinct people have survived only when living in mountains.

History of the Kurdish homeland

The weavings discussed in this book generally date to the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. To understand Kurdish weaving as we know it, it is necessary to look at the more recent history of the various Kurdish urban centers, villages, tribes, and exclaves. For five hundred years the Kurdish heartland was located between two superpowers: the Ottoman Empire (centered on what is now Turkey) and Persia (now Iran). During this era the relative freedom of the varied Kurdish entities from Ottoman and Persian pressure and control shaped their ability to weave creative art. For a period of 125 years (1514–1639) the Ottomans and Persians were constantly at war, and much of their fighting took place where the Kurds lived, in Northern Kurdistan (eastern Anatolia) and Azerbaijan. The central and eastern areas of Kurdistan were also adversely affected by this warfare. The fighting decimated the people, their land, their commerce, and, concomitantly, their weaving ability. Throughout the seventeenth century the Ottomans and the Persians continued to exert pressure on most Kurdish territories, inhibiting the freedom and artistic endeavors of the people. However, as a result of certain political factors (discussed below) the last half of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth became a productive time for Kurdish weaving.

In 1722 the Afghans invaded Persia, captured the capital city of Isfahan (Esfahan), and occupied eastern parts of central Persia. The Safavid dynasty, which had ruled Persia for over two hundred years, ended. Shortly after this, the Ottoman Turks marched into Persia from the west and seized roughly a quarter of Persia's territory, including the major cities of Tabriz, Ardebil, Hamadan, and Kirmanshah. The Russians then invaded from the north and forced Persia to cede its Caspian Sea provinces of Mazanderan, Gilan, Asterabad, and parts of Shirvan and Dagestan.

Soon thereafter Nadir Quli Khan, an Afshar-Turkoman tribal leader, reorganized the remnants of the Persian army along with mercenaries and tribesmen, and began to win back the territory lost to the various invaders. In 1729 he defeated the Afghans. He then defeated the Ottomans in several battles, regaining lost territory. Seeing Nadir's success against the Ottomans, Russia chose to give back the Caspian Sea provinces rather than face a battle.[2] Nadir proclaimed himself Shah of Persia in 1736 and ruled until 1747 when he was assassinated by some of his Kurdish generals in Khurasan.

opposite **A group of Kurdish chiefs in the late nineteenth century.**



right **Wife of a Kurdish chieftan, photographed in 1890.**



far right **Portrait of an unknown Kurdish nobleman in 1865.**

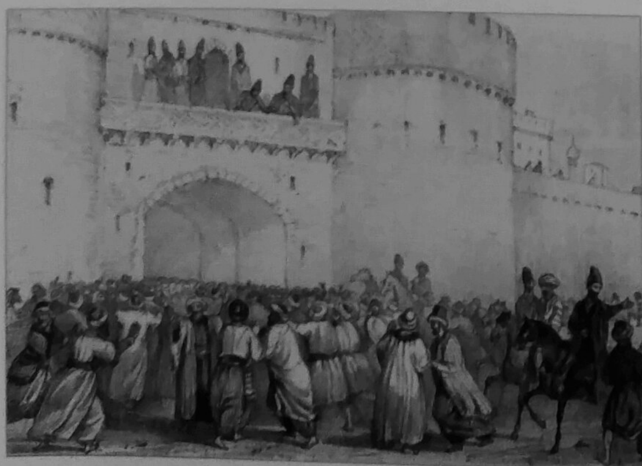
Nadir had saved Persia militarily. In the process he had also virtually bankrupted the central Persian economy as well as causing serious social disruption by shifting tribal populations, including Kurds, from place to place in order to satisfy the manpower needs of his eastern expeditions. He also relocated those populations as a pre-emptive move against restive or potentially restive tribes. For ten years after his death there waged a civil war, which further exacerbated the social and economic chaos in Persia. This disruption impoverished the wealthy classes, and the production of fine Persian carpets diminished as a result.

In 1757 Karim Khan Zand declared himself ruler of Persia. Karim was Kurdish: his mother was an Ardalan Kurd and his father was of the Zand clan of the Lak, located near the city of Malayir south of Hamadan. Karim made his capital in faraway Shiraz, and, in contrast to the Safavids' strongly centralized government, generally allowed the various local tribal khans, emirs, and other leaders to rule their own principalities. Thousands of Lors, Bakhtiari, and Kurds displaced by Nadir from their Zagros mountain homeland returned to their native lands, and western Persian tribesmen enjoyed a period of power, affluence, and autonomy. The Zand dynasty lasted until 1794, a period of thirty-seven years.

In the western Zagros Mountains and in eastern Anatolia, strife between the Ottoman Turks and Persia (a conflict that had endured for two hundred years, and which was a burden on the Kurdish population residing in the marches between Persia and Turkey) diminished in the eighteenth century. This occurred for various reasons, including a series of wars between Turkey and Russia which made demands on Turkey's military resources. The Ottoman government weakened, losing power, influence, and lands during the eighteenth century, and generally left the Kurdish territories alone. These political circumstances in Persia and Ottoman Turkey benefited the Kurds, serving to enhance their lives and lessen their economic burdens – which in turn stimulated their weaving production.

Kurdish fiefdoms in the mountainous areas of western Persia, eastern Anatolia, and upper Mesopotamia (a part of which is now northern Iraq) were thus able to pursue commercial activities in an unfettered manner; these activities included the production of quality tribal and urban rugs for domestic use and for export. The nomadic tribal weavers, temporarily free from domination – and taxation – by centralized Persian and Ottoman rulers, as well as from the wars between these countries which had ravished their lands, found themselves with the freedom, the relative independence, and the wealth to weave rugs of the finest local materials, employing their traditional tribal patterns and totemic devices.

Kurdish khans and emirs were now able to have fine tribal and urban pieces woven for their tents and urban dwellings. As the chieftains purchased these rugs, they stimulated the production of more and better offerings, which in turn produced a wider and more demanding market in an upward spiral of ever-increasing quality. The urban weaving schools of Kurdistan, including Garrus, Senna, Sonqor, and Sa'uj Bulagh, also helped to satisfy local and foreign demand, filling a vacuum created by the economic and political instability in Persia and Ottoman Turkey: they produced large, attractive, colorful pieces which became fashionable in the eighteenth century.[3]



left **The fortress of Malazgird (medieval Manzikert), in Northern Kurdistan, as seen in 1840.**

opposite left **Kurdish tribesmen making bread and weaving carpets, beginning of the nineteenth century.**

opposite right **A group of armed Kurdish horsemen in Eastern Kurdistan in 1886.**

A number of factors, then, influenced Kurdish weavers in the eighteenth century. First, the disruption in commerce that resulted from the displacement of power in Persia and from the Russian–Ottoman wars served to lessen the competition from Persian and Ottoman weavers, allowing the Kurds to attract a larger share of the market.[4] Second, the power shift from the opulence-loving, urbane Safavids to the more austere, tribal-oriented khans carried with it a concomitant shift in taste, from highly ornate, sophisticated pieces to simpler, uncomplicated carpets. Third, foreign markets,[5] combined with the local demand for fine carpets, encouraged the Kurdish weaving centers in western Persia to both improve the quality of their materials and weaving and increase the quantity of their output.

The socio-economic phenomena discussed above were, until recently, little regarded by rug historians. In the first half of the twentieth century, historians such as Arthur Upham Pope, Kurt Erdmann, and Wilhelm von Bode glorified the elaborate carpets woven in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Persia while largely ignoring the plainer style of carpets which had been woven anonymously for centuries by Kurds and others in western Persia; this despite the fact that the latter had become fashionable in the years between the 1722 defeat of the Safavids by the Afghans, and the Persian economic revival that began in 1850. This is akin to writing a survey of French furniture and dwelling only upon the ornate pieces that were produced in the Louis XIV, XV, and XVI eras, omitting the artistic unostentatious work done in the provinces and in Gothic or Empire times. A. Cecil Edwards in his 1953 book *The Persian Carpet* related that the people of Persia paid little attention to any of the arts during the "dark period" (1722–1850), and his book also paid little attention to the carpets woven during that time.[6] Edwards was in the carpet business for fifty years and lived in Persia for thirteen years. He would obviously have been aware of and have had access to carpets woven during this 125-year era, yet he chose to not write about them; he was presumably more focused on the modern carpets that his company and others were producing in Persia in the twentieth century. Edwards and the other rug historians are hardly alone in ignoring Kurdish weavings: even today the recent surge of rug literature extolling the virtues of antique Ottoman carpets tends to ignore Kurdish attributions and label Kurdish work as "Yuruk," "tribal," "Eastern Anatolian," "East of Konya," or "Turkish."

The period of relative independence and economic stability that the Kurds experienced in the eighteenth century soon became disrupted. Toward the end of the century the Kurds were attacked by both their historic enemies. In 1794 the Qajars (a Turkoman clan from Mazanderan, in the Caspian region of Persia) ascended the throne of Persia, and the Kurds' autonomy and power in Persia began a long and steady decline. The Qajars strove to eliminate local control by the emirs and chieftains, and to reunify Persia under their strong central government. The Qajars seized valuable trade routes formerly controlled by the Kurds, and began to impose exorbitant taxes on them.

Meanwhile, on the other side of Kurdistan, the Ottomans – seeing the Kurds' prosperity as a threat to their aspirations of power in eastern Anatolia – attacked, destroyed, and subjugated Kurdish cities and strongholds there. Like the Persians, the Ottomans then levied and collected high taxes, usually in the form of sheep; the consequences for rug production are





self-evident. During the nineteenth century this loss of independence, resources, and – ultimately – pride took an ever-greater toll on not only the materials used but also the artistic quality of the weavings produced by the Kurds in both Persian- and Ottoman-influenced territories.

In addition to the tax burdens imposed by the Kurds' foreign overlords, epidemics and internecine warfare between several Kurdish groups also contributed to a decline in Kurdish population and affluence. Elsewhere in Persia during the nineteenth century, prosperity was returning and carpet-weaving was being revitalized. Rug historians from the West have proclaimed that the "dark ages" of weaving in Persia ended in 1850 when the so-called Persian economic revival commenced. Favorable conditions in the urban centers of Persia, the desire of the rising merchant class for fine weavings, and the Qajar rulers' push to export Persian goods to the rest of the world, all created an upsurge of weaving in Persian urban centers.

The arrival of European merchants to establish rug-producing factories in Persia in the 1880s spawned a wave of commercial weaving designed to provide uniform floor coverings, with patterns and sizes chosen to satisfy the fashionable desires of European and North American home owners. By the end of the nineteenth century, Persian carpets were a major commercial industry. But, with the exception of commercial urban weaving ateliers in Senna and Garrus, Kurdish weavers did not participate in this revival. In tribal areas of Kurdistan, the formerly vibrant, exciting nomadic weavings had by the end of the nineteenth century degenerated into dull, lifeless, muddy-colored floor coverings fit only for utilitarian purposes.

Just as the social conditions of the Kurds enhanced their ability to produce creative pieces prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, the changing conditions contributed to its decline. Starting around 1800 and accelerating through the course of the nineteenth century, most of the Kurdish principalities and fiefdoms lost their independence and affluence, and as their power and prosperity declined, so too did their ability to produce creative, artistic weavings (although certain Kurdish weaving centers and groups – especially those in the areas most inaccessible to Persian or Ottoman control and markets – did manage to maintain acceptable work throughout the nineteenth century).

Most of the Kurdish carpets illustrated in this volume were woven between 1725 and 1850, a period that produced, in my opinion, weavings of ethnographic importance as well as aesthetic merit. The Kurdish rugs that predated this period have virtually all vanished, or are not known to us as Kurdish.

Modes of production

Kurdish weavers may be divided into three groups: urban "factory" weavers, settled village weavers, and nomadic tribal weavers. Urban weavers were employed in workshops or small factories. Their weavings were made exclusively for sale, both domestically and abroad. Their carpets were often larger and/or more elaborate than village or nomadic productions since their customers tended to be more prosperous, with large homes to furnish. Important urban weaving workshops were located in Sonqor, Senna, Garrus, and Sa'uj Bulagh. Village weavers were sedentary Kurds who were principally farmers, not nomads. They wove more modest pieces for their own purposes and for



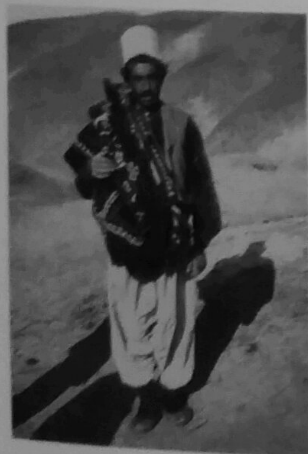
left **Bridge over the Greater Zab River, Central Kurdistan, photographed in 1886.**

trade. The nomadic Kurds were those who migrated twice a year, taking their herds of sheep and goats to summer and winter pastures. Although they lived in clusters – in tents or in stone huts – for much of the year, between migrations, they also needed to be able to pack all their belongings onto their animals. Their weavings were utilitarian – they wove what they needed in their own lives, in sizes that they could transport on their migrations – and employed an imagery of their own self-expression.

The best Kurdish tribal weavings are not only aesthetically attractive but also provide a glimpse into the weaver's physical and social environment, a reflection of and a commentary upon the society which created them. As with most art, the Kurdish weavers reveal much of themselves in their creations; as a result, these unpretentious rugs can cause a strong visceral reaction in us. The weavings were created by physically and mentally strong women who, though living a hard life, possessed a keen appreciation of the harmony of colors and designs. The strength of these designs mirrors the strength and independence of the Kurdish women, who came closer to equality with their husbands than did any of their Middle Eastern sisters. They passed down their designs and techniques from mother to daughter. (Kurdish men, meanwhile, tended the flocks, sheared the animals, and dyed the wool, passing down their recipes from father to son.) Their weaving expressed their communal tastes and was not influenced by Persian or Ottoman-Turkish work, nor by European or North American commercial interests. They primarily wove pile rugs and flatweaves for their own use in their tents: they made few large rugs, which would have burdened them on their migrations. The symbols, designs, and structures employed by the Kurdish tribal weavers were influenced by traditions, by the rugged terrain, by the extremes of their climate, and by the demanding physical circumstances which defined their lives.

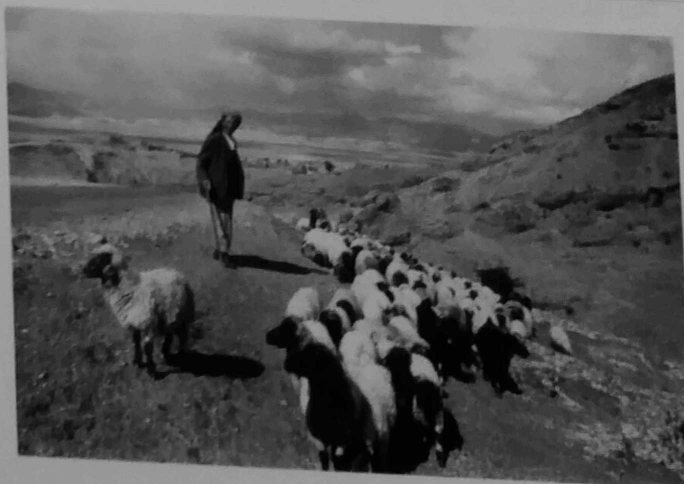
The tribes responsible for most of the nomadic pieces shown in this book performed perilous migration treks twice a year, up and down the mountains. In the spring the nomads would pack their black tents, move their belongings into woven bags, and, with their households and flocks, leave their small villages to go to their traditional mountain pastures for two or three months. When the summer heat abated they would return to their villages. Most tribes would also make a winter migration to the lowlands, again seeking pasture for their flocks.

Anyone who has viewed the film *Grass*, which recorded and cinematically preserved a 1924 migration of Bakhtiari nomads, will remember the men, women, children, and animals struggling across icy rivers and up steep rocky trails as they climbed the Zagros, the great mountain range of western Persia, seeking summer pasture for their flocks.[7] Just as there was nothing soft, indolent, or opulent about their lifestyle, there is nothing soft, indolent, or opulent about their weavings. We who live in the twenty-first century probably cannot appreciate how climate and physical hardship dominated lifestyles prior to the technological and medical advances of the twentieth century. The weavers' lives shaped their mental processes and influenced them spiritually, leading to the creation of strong, durable, colorful, honest, and individualistic works of art.



left Kurdish peasant with a carpet draped over his shoulder, early twentieth century.

right A Kurd tending his sheep on the road to Zakho, west Central Kurdistan, in the mid-twentieth century.



There is a recognizable style to Kurdish weavings, whether they have been woven in urban workshops where hired weavers produced works designed to be sold, or in tribal areas where families – primarily nomadic – made pieces for their own use. The designs, the colors, the combinations of colors, the construction, and the dimensions differ from most other weavings produced in the Middle East.[8] Weavings from well-known Kurdish urban rug centers such as Senna and Garrus are usually identifiable because of their consistency in design and construction. The identification of work from less well-known urban workshops is more difficult, however, and the same goes for most tribal pieces.

Identification problems and methods

Unlike the more fully researched groups of Near and Middle Eastern weavings, the literature regarding antique (pre-twentieth-century) Kurdish tribal weavings is minimal. Thousands of Kurdish clans lived separately from each other in the rugged mountains, each employing different designs, weaving methods, and dyes, and drawing on different traditions. Different dialects, different religions, poor communications, difficult roads, ancient customs, and old jealousies all worked to minimize interaction among the various tribes, and kept the tribal weavers from using other clans' designs or any "alien fashions." To further complicate the task of identifying antique tribal weavings today, in the nineteenth century many established tribes lost their identity and disappeared: some died out entirely; others joined tribal confederacies where their identities were submerged into the identity of whichever tribe dominated the confederacy; some were forcibly moved by foreign powers fighting over their lands; and some lost





opposite The palace of Is'haq Pasha, Dogubayazit, Northern Kurdistan.

above The tents of Soma, near the Araxes River in Northern Kurdistan.

their grazing lands (and thus their source of wool), forcing them to become sedentary.

A number of other factors make the identification of Kurdish tribal weavings difficult. Firstly, there is the absence of written evidence. Volumes of history have been written in Persian about the Ardalans (a historic princely house that dominated much of Eastern Kurdistan from the sixteenth century until its fall as an independent government in 1867), but none of these histories mentions weaving. The same goes for other Kurdish epics and histories written in Persian. The Kurdish language has no written form, so there are no sources in the Kurds' native tongue. Some Europeans published reports of their visits to the Kurds but they paid scant attention to the Kurds' weavings.[9]

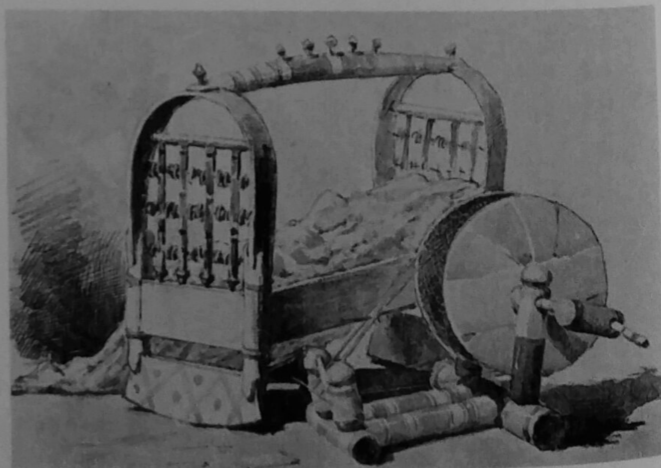
The disruption of the Kurdish culture has also played its part. The subjugation of the Kurds and the devastation of their homelands and culture by Persian and Ottoman rulers from the sixteenth century onward not only affected their weavings but also led to a dearth of knowledge about those weavings.

An anti-tribal bias or disinterest on the part of rug historians has also contributed to the identification difficulties we experience today. During the first half of the twentieth century a number of rug historians traveled to Turkey and Persia and published accounts of antique Persian and Turkish weaving. These historians could have visited the various Kurdish areas and collected the oral and visual information which was then still available, but unfortunately they showed no interest in doing so. This disinterest allowed that information to be lost.

Until recently Kurdish weavings were not accorded the respect and appreciation that they deserved, often being branded "barbaric" and "primitive" by museums and early rug collectors. As a result many superb pieces were not preserved, and there were few attempts to research the weaving provenance of those pieces which did survive. When I first started collecting Kurdish pieces in the early 1960s, dealers and other collectors looked down on Kurdish tribal works: they were referred to as "Kurd-Kazaks" in an attempt to give them more cachet. However, since the 1960s tribal art from all parts of the world has become increasingly appreciated. It is now recognized that "primitive" art, sophisticated in its very simplicity, can be spiritual, uplifting, and a true expression of the people: museums and collectors are currently vying with each other to acquire this traditional art.

Nineteenth-century accounts of travelers' treks through Kurdish lands provide us with some information regarding the various Kurdish tribes and principalities. By employing a combination of travelers' accounts, historical evidence, circumstantial evidence, personal observations, assistance from rug collector colleagues, rug dealer lore, and common sense, I have attempted to identify the Kurdish weavings in this book. However, there are few consistent and reliable rules or signposts to assist in determining the weaving sources of these old pieces. Most of the current rug literature rhapsodizes about the designs and colors seen in antique Kurdish pieces but at the same time refers vaguely to their origins as "Northwest Persian," "Eastern Anatolian," "Yuruk," "South Caucasian," or – as A. Cecil Edwards and others have done – refers to all Kurdish nomadic work as "tribal" rugs. When I was invited to

right **Spindle and Kurdish cradle of the late nineteenth century.**



identify those rugs that were Kurdish in the vaults of the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. I found that all but the Senna pieces were identified under their country of origin rather than the people that made them.

This book aims to provide an analysis of the construction of the weavings depicted in the plates (see Structural Analyses, pages 308–312), to compare the colors and designs of the various pieces, to disseminate what history and knowledge of the various weaving clans and centers is available, and to suggest the source of the workmanship. Each weaving has been placed in one of the seven designated geographical-cultural districts of Kurdistan, and then, where possible – a more difficult task – assigned to a particular clan, province, or urban site within that district. It is the author's hope that the information provided herein will afford a working hypothesis for further research regarding Kurdish weaving production.

I have used the time-honored approach of identifying old weavings by examining "modern" Kurdish rugs (those woven in the past hundred years) from known areas and tribes. One can then compare the structure, colors, and designs of these newer works, whose origin we know, with the same elements found in the older pieces. Design, color, and construction carry forward through successive generations of weavers, even when quality is lost. William Eagleton's book *An Introduction to Kurdish Rugs* provides important data on twentieth-century Kurdish work as well as offering many photographic examples for such comparisons.[10] Wilfred Stanzer's book on the Kurds of Khurasan is helpful in identifying Kurdish work from that area.[11]

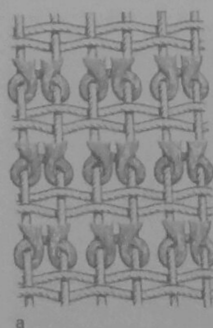
Weaving construction

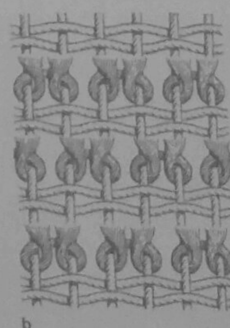
Most weavings are constructed by stretching cords (called warps) of wool, cotton, or another material vertically between two poles; further cords (called wefts) of wool, cotton, or another material are inserted into the warps in a perpendicular fashion, producing an interlaced fabric. To produce a pile rug, rows of knots are tied around warp cords, and weft cords are then inserted to hold the knots into the structure. The design is created by varying the colors of the knots. Certain colors, designs, types of wool, and construction techniques can assist in identifying a weaving as Kurdish, while certain variations may allow one to assign the piece to a more specific place of origin. Before attempting to identify a weaving origin one must carefully examine each of the essential elements used by the weaver: the materials, the construction techniques (knotting, weft, warp, side and end treatments), the size, the colors and combinations of colors, and the designs.

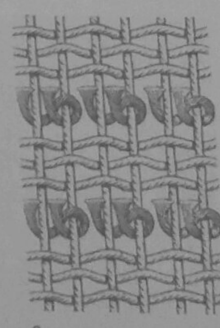
The weaving elements and construction techniques employed by the Kurds can be outlined as follows.

Knotting In all the Kurdish rugs the author has examined the knotting is symmetrical (see diagrams a and b, below), rather than asymmetrical (see diagram c). It is generally of wool, but occasionally silk or cotton is used to highlight certain details. In Central and Northern Kurdistan offset symmetrical knotting (see diagram b) is often employed.

Weft The tribal Kurds characteristically used wool for their wefts, in natural brown, dyed brown or red, or, less frequently, natural ivory. Occasionally they mixed ivory and brown.


a


b


c

right **Knotting techniques. The rows are shown with the wefts uncompacted so that the techniques are more clearly visible. After a row of wefts is inserted it is beaten down and packed tight with a comb-like tool. The knots are then tied, and beaten with the same tool. After a large area has been completed, the loops at the top of the knots are cut to form the pile.**

a **Symmetrical knotting, with two wefts between each row of knots.**
b **Offset symmetrical knotting, with two wefts between each row of knots.**
c **Asymmetrical knotting, with three wefts between each row of knots.**

↑ warp
→ weft

Certain groups, such as tribes living near Sa'uj Bulagh, near Sulaymania, and in Khurasan, dyed the wool for their wefts red or red-brown. Old Kurdish tribal weavings often have different dyed colors of wool weft in the same piece. Some urban weavers and a few tribal groups that were close to cotton producing areas used cotton for their weft. Generally the weavings that predate 1800 (i.e. from a period when the Kurds were more affluent) contain more cotton than do nineteenth-century Kurdish weavings. Prior to the twentieth century cotton was more expensive for the nomadic Kurds than wool. Nomads had their sheep and goats as a source of wool, but cotton had to be cultivated and purchased.

Most Kurdish groups employed two weft threads between each row of knots. Some groups in Southern Kurdistan, such as the Sanjabi and many of the Koliya'i, generally employed a single weft between each row of knots, as did the weavers of Senna. However, the number of weft cords between rows of knots is not a consistent determining factor in the identification of old Kurdish weavings. The carpet depicted in plate 28 has one weft between each row of knots for three feet and two wefts between each row of knots for the remaining seven feet. An examination of other old pieces reveals variables in wefting and the occasional use of camel hair, goat hair, and dog hair. It might be said that one of the consistencies of Kurdish weaving is the inconsistency in construction.

The wool yarn used by Kurds for the weft (as well as for the warp and pile) is generally spun counter-clockwise (designated "Z" in weaving literature). Two strands of this yarn are then twisted together clockwise ("S"), and the compound strand is denoted "Z2S." Some of the tribes in western and central Kurdistan used only one strand of wool for the weft. Some high mountain groups used three or more strands twisted together.

Warp Urban pieces and the tribal rugs woven in Southern Kurdistan tend to have natural ivory warps of either wool or cotton. The tribal pieces from other areas tend to have just wool warps – natural ivory, light brown, or dark brown – sometimes twisted together in what is referred to as a "salt-and-pepper" effect. Tribal rugs were usually woven with warps on the same level, producing a flat-looking back.

Side finish The side finishes vary. Most Kurdish tribal rugs woven in the central Zagros Mountains, for example, have a selvedge of multiple warp cords on each side which have been overcast (wrapped) with protective weft threads. Pieces woven in the northern Zagros Mountains, the Taurus Mountains, and Western Kurdistan usually have two or more warp cord flat selvedges, sometimes with a herringbone figure-eight overcast of two or more colors, sometimes with an overcast that resembles a zipper. Selvedges of up to eight cords are found on pieces woven in the most rugged mountain areas; these are wrapped with weft threads, and some have supplementary wool wrapping to secure further protection from the elements.

End finish Many of the tribal pile rugs have the top end braided and plaited and the bottom end in plaits or kilim finish. The tribal Kurds also liked to weave colorful contrasting lines of thread in the kilim finish ends, and this can be a clue to identification. Most of the rugs included in this book, however, have lost their original sides and ends.

Size Kurdish dwellings traditionally tended to feature long, narrow rooms – whether inside the tents of nomads, inside the stone huts used by both the settled agriculturalists (all year round) and by some of the nomads (during the seasons when they were not on migrations), or inside the larger homes of the khans and other leaders. This meant that the rugs and kilims woven for these rooms were also long and narrow. The large carpets (*kellegi*) produced in urban workshops were usually two to three times as long as they were wide, and the side carpets (*kenare*) that traditionally flanked the *kellegi* were the same length but narrower. Most of the tribal carpets were either *kenare*-size (often called "runners" in the Western world), which were used as carpets for the floor or as seating along the sides of the tent, or were *dozar*-size (ranging from approximately 3' × 5' to 4' × 6' / 90 × 150 cm to 120 × 180 cm), which the tribespeople spread over their floors.

Various storage bags and saddlebags, plus special weavings such as saddle-covers and tent or animal paraphernalia, were woven to accommodate specific tasks in the nomad's life. Kilims, which were woven in various sizes, were used as curtain dividers between men's and women's quarters, as wind shields, as bed covers, as storage wraps, as floor coverings in warmer climates, and as insulation within the tents to act as barriers against the cold.

Handle The "handle" of a rug is its feel: its stiffness, its weight, its softness. Kurdish rugs vary in construction and thus handle from area to area.

Color Down the centuries color has probably been the most consistent factor of all in Kurdish weavings, as each clan usually employed local indigenous substances to create the colors they traditionally found pleasing. Every color that was used had significance to the tribal Kurd, and each group consistently utilized its preferred colors and combinations of colors. This can therefore greatly assist us in delineating a particular group of weavers. The colors employed in the old carpets were derived from minerals, from insects, and from plant materials such as flowers, roots, berries, pomegranate rinds, vine leaves, and nuts. The formulas for creating these colors were passed down in the dyer trade from father to son. The minerals found in the water where the wool was washed differed from area to area, and this also affected the shades of colors.

In about 1860, chemical dyes were introduced into the Near and Middle East and some were used by Kurds, largely in the urban areas. Most rural and tribal weavers, however, continued to use natural dyes until as late as the 1920s. This was in part because it was difficult for new products to penetrate into the mountainous areas of Kurdistan, and in part because Kurds prided themselves on their use of traditional materials. Even after the advent of chemical dyes, weavers continued to employ the abundantly available natural color sources and only used chemical dyes for colors that were more difficult to obtain, such as purple.

In ancient times deities were associated with different colors, and the use of a deity's color was a way of representing that deity. In Kurdish mythology Khidir (Khizr) is the lord of the underworld ocean, or abyss. In weaving, the abyss is symbolically represented as a geometric pond with the representative

right **Kurdish women making a reed screen in Eastern Kurdistan in the 1930s.**



of the lord, the turtle, placed within it. Since ancient times Khidir has been revered by Kurds of all religions, but he is especially important to the Sufis and to Yazdani (Cult of Angels) worshipers,[12] who believe that he assisted Noah on the Ark.[13] Although most Kurds today are Sunni Muslims, they still pay respect to Khidir. Shrines to Khidir can be found in Kurdistan by deep ponds or springs; it is believed that beneath their waters he lives forever.[14] To the Kurds, the color blue represents the deep waters in which Khidir resides. Kurdish weavers frequently employ blue as a field ground color in their pile rugs and kilims, and arguably this color was originally used to pay homage to Khidir. It has since been replicated by generations of weavers who were probably unaware of its original religious significance. It is also possible that blue was often used simply because in most districts of Kurdistan, indigo was cultivated and readily available for dyeing.

Likewise, Noah – a demi-god to the pre-modern Kurds, and especially to the followers of the Ahl-i-Haqq branch of the Yazdani religion – has been represented since ancient times by the colors green and white. The Kurds produced green by overdyeing indigo-dyed wool with a yellow dye obtained from processing the weld or larkspur plant, which grew wild in the mountainous areas of their homeland. The Kurds often employ blue and green together in their weavings, and this is one of the color combinations that can assist in making an attribution to Kurdish looms.

The root of the madder plant was commonly used throughout Kurdistan for many different shades of red. Henna was used to obtain an orange-red tonality. The insect-derived dye kermes was used in both Western and Northern Kurdistan to produce a crimson-pink color. The wool of white sheep was used for natural ivory; brown sheep wool was the main source for brown, and was extensively used by the tribal Kurds for their warp and weft. Iron oxide, which has a tendency to corrode wool, was used to brighten and darken colors, mostly for dark browns and a shade of purplish-red. Rugs woven in the Sa'uj Bulagh area can be readily identified by their brown-black field which, because of the use of iron oxide, has corroded to reveal the red-dyed weft color they also usually employed (see, for example, plate 45).

Kurdish tribal weavers were fond of using a plethora of strong colors in their weavings to simulate the brilliant wild flowers found in the highland meadows of their migration passages. A century after the creation of these carpets, the colors are often still vivid despite the passing of time. As Anahid Akasheh relates: "The uncontrollable Kurdish taste for truly wild colors of all shades, hues and combinations shows itself in Kurdish fabrics and, in combinations with certain design motifs, is a prime identifying criterion. The idea of 'clashing colors' has no meaning to a Kurdish mountaineer living in nature's painting studio where no color restrictions apply."[15] The "wild" combinations of colors are one of the endearing characteristics of Kurdish weaving and in addition assist us in identifying the work as Kurdish.

Characteristic designs

Kurdish designs draw from various sources, including the ancient Halaf, Hurrian, Aryan, Assyrian, Mesopotamian, and Sasanian cultures. Some designs are derived from ancient

right **Kurds dancing at a wedding in Sulaymania, Central Kurdistan, as depicted by Claudius Rich in 1835.**



Kurdish religions. For example, some of the tribes of Central and Northern Kurdistan often weave an eight-pointed star, the ancient symbol of the Hurrian weather god Teshup, which was replicated by the Kurdish Zelan dynasty (plates 22 and 75). The *abzu* (abyss) was the underworld waters of the Sumerians, and the abyss is also part of Kurdish mythology, where it is known as *'hauz'* (or *hauzi*, an etymological derivative of *abzu*). Plate 23 illustrates a representation of the abyss design.

Although today about sixty percent of Kurds are adherents of Sunni Islam, with others belonging to mainstream Shi'ite Islam (with minor communities of Kurdish Jews, Christians, and Baha'is), Kurdish cultural roots go back to the ancient Hurrian religion of Yazdanism, loosely translated as the "Cult of Angels" ("Yazda" means "angel"). This is an indigenous Kurdish faith of great antiquity and originality. An inclusive religion that embraces all other religions, Yazdanism does not oppose, exclude, or reject any other creed. Its followers believe in reincarnation, in the equality of men and women, and in communal ownership of property.

The three surviving major denominations of Yazdanism are Yezidism (practiced by two percent of all Kurds, primarily in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and the northwest Caucasus), Yarsanism or the Ahl-i-Haqq (thirteen percent, now primarily in Southern Kurdistan), and Alevism (twenty percent, primarily in Western Kurdistan and Khurasan). In addition, most Kurds, regardless of their religion, are followers of one of several mystic Sufi orders. The lord of the abyss, Khidir, discussed above in relation to color symbolism, is widely revered, especially by Yazdanis and Sufis; he is often symbolized by the pond turtle (*raqa*), whose longevity reflects Khidir's everlasting life (plates 63 and 64). Some weavings have representations of turtles swimming in the abyss (plate 56). The borders of some Yazdani-inspired rugs may feature land turtles, which are also symbols of Khidir and his longevity (plate 23). Other Kurdish motifs, such as snakes, dragons, and birds, are also derived from Yazdanism. Amulets, *muskas* (good luck symbols), and other talismanic tribal devices have often been replicated by tribal weavers down the centuries.

A diamond with hooked appendages used by the Shanbo confederation of Northern Kurdistan as a heraldic device (plate 56) finds its way into the repertoire of other Kurdish clans, including that of the Herki (plate 22), the Shaqaqi (plate 67), and some Kurds in the Caucasus (plate 80). The origin of this symbol is not known. Like many geometric motifs – including the cross, which appears in the design vocabulary of many civilizations predating Christianity – this design may have ancient non-Kurdish antecedents.

The "diamond with hooked appendages" symbol also appears in the weaving repertoire of several tribal groups not presently identified as Kurdish, such as a generally nomadic Turkoman clan in Central Asia which uses the motif in their rugs. A footnote in history reveals that in 1000 AD, five thousand Kurdish mercenaries were in the service of the monarch Ghaznavids in Afghanistan; their families joined them and they acted as border guards for the Afghani king. History does not record the fate of these Kurds. Did they assimilate into groups in Central Asia, or did they return to their Zagros Mountains homeland? Probably some stayed, with their weaving designs and skills,

and others returned. The Qarachorlu clan of Lake Van, deported to Khurasan in the seventeenth century by Safavid shahs, became the Qarachorlu clan of Central Asia. Many but not all of them returned to Northern Kurdistan a century later to rejoin their kinsmen there. The Qassimlu Kurds, who lived west of Lake Urmia, were also sent to Khurasan at that time, and part of that group returned in later centuries. Zand Kurds from the Malayir area of Persia – including the family of Karim Zand, who was later to rule Persia – were deported to Khurasan by Nadir Shah in the late 1730s; they returned in 1747 after Nadir's death. Designs travel with their creators. Groups can change religions, language, and locations, but their art usually stays the same.

The Kurdish nomads' ancestral repertoire of symbols and designs includes ancient totemic devices which were significant to their clan: symbols of their desire for good luck, prosperity, and favorable childbirth; the beauty and dangers of the nature that surrounded them; and the perils and pleasures associated with their annual migrations. With a spontaneity that is rarely found in other Middle Eastern weavings, they depicted the flowers, trees, water, stars, birds, and animals that featured in their own lives. Commercial influences were excluded: they wove for themselves, not for foreign markets.

Because of their mountainous isolation from the Western world and its commercialism, Kurdish designs persisted unadulterated into the twentieth century. They were employed in diverse ways by the individual tribes: for example, many different groups of Kurds used the popular *mina khani* design, varying the colors and details. Generally, the Kurds in the north wove geometrical designs while the Kurds in the south wove in a more curvilinear manner.

It is usually not prudent to use the design of a weaving as a way of identifying its source because some designs, especially those field designs that were successful and popular, were copied by other ethnic groups. Kurdish weavers were no exception, especially those who were commercially employed and those who lived in close proximity to other cultural groups. However, because of the isolation of most Kurdish tribal groups prior to the twentieth century, and because of tribal pride, designs were not usually copied from tribe to tribe. Furthermore, non-Kurdish weavers would not usually copy the plethora of small amulets and devices that the Kurds often employed in their weavings, as they had no significance for the other groups.

When examining Kurdish tribal weavings, therefore, designs may be of assistance in determining the source. In this author's experience, the designs of the major and minor borders are more consistent within a weaving area than are the field designs, and offer a better key to identification. A weaver might employ various field designs but she would usually use the same clan borders. The colors and combinations of colors employed are more significant for identification purposes than is the design, allowing one to differentiate between rugs of similar design made by Kurds and by non-Kurds.

The illustrations presented here include examples of Kurdish tribal, village, and urban weaving. As mentioned above, urban weavings were made for sale, whereas tribal and village weavings were made primarily for the weaver's own use. Tribal

designs were copied by urban weavers and urban designs were copied by tribal weavers, but there are distinct differences in their execution.

Nomadic rugs Nomadic weavers often employ symbols such as hooked polygons within hexagonal forms (plate 68) and confronting angled birds' heads (plate 63), and generally use small shapes and forms which fill up the field of the weaving (plate 65). Amulets, stars, combs, replication of jewelry, animals, "X" devices, "S" devices, and human and other figures are often crammed into every perceived void. A profusion of talismanic devices in the field of a weaving is a significant clue that the piece could be Kurdish. Urban weavers, by contrast, would be given a design to follow which did not include clan devices or these whimsical shapes and forms.

When political disruptions forced Kurdish tribes to relocate, not surprisingly the tribal weavers in their new, resettled areas continued to employ the same designs and types of construction as they and their ancestors had used for hundreds of years in their old homelands hundreds of miles away. So a design traditionally utilized by the Kurds in eastern Anatolia – for example, large diamonds in the field with confronting birds' head latch-hooks on the perimeter (as seen in plate 68) – continued to appear centuries after members of these clans were resettled in Khurasan far to the east (see the minor *guls* in plate 100) and in Cihanbeyli far to the west (see plate 94). The designs survived through the ages and the waves of emigrations, as did the colors and combinations of color employed, although the shades of colors varied because of the differing availability of materials needed for the dye process.

Workshop and village rugs Kurdish workshop weavings, produced primarily in urban and sedentary centers, were often designed for the more affluent households throughout the Near and Middle East and for export. Unlike nomadic productions, the colors and designs were influenced by commercial concerns. Ancient Kurdish designs were employed, as were the design elements of Persian carpets, albeit in a different, plainer style. Villagers made rugs for their own use and for trade, but usually did not have the capability to make large rugs. The largest carpets were generally woven in commercial urban workshops and, unlike the weavings of the nomads, did not have to be readily portable.

Designs and motifs

Kurdish weavers have employed a number of designs and motifs down the centuries. Outlined below are some of the most characteristic of these, all of which can be seen on examples in this book.

Field designs

abyss medallion	an ancient design, with a religious derivation, representing deep waters (plate 66)
bid majnum	depicts the weeping willow along with other trees such as the cypress (*serv*), the cherry in blossom, and the plane (plate 45)
chwarsuch	squares with a network of grid-lines; also called the "crossroad" design (plate 46)
diagonal diamonds	a design often employed by the Jaf tribes (plate 16)


abyss medallion


bid majnum

chwarsuch


diagonal diamonds


masi awita fish swimming around a lotus flower (called "Herati" by Western writers) (plate 31)

mina khani depicting the aster flower with its vines and tendrils; seen in urban (plate 1) and tribal (plate 3) variations

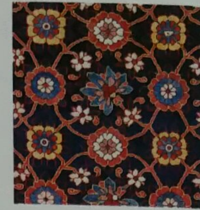
raqa a pond turtle motif (plate 64)

shrub-flowers an overall design of shrubs or flowers, sometimes arranged in a grid (plate 6)

sikh kababi leaves pointing from the borders to a central flower in a lattice format (to the Persians they resemble kebab skewers) (plate 24)



masi awita



mina khani



mina khani (tribal)



raqa

Border designs

bird a variety of bird motifs appear; one example is geese with elongated necks (plate 70)

butterfly a floral motif, but resembling a butterfly (plate 3)

kisal a land turtle motif (plate 24)

lawlaw o kajina usually referred to in Western literature as "serrated leaf and calyx"; the Kurdish name means "lotus and pine cones" (plate 13)

mountain peak a jagged peak motif; also known as the "running dog," "latch-hook," or "wave" design (plate 64)



shrub-flowers



sikh kababi



bird



butterfly



mountain peak



reciprocal trefoil



kisal



rosette



zanbaqi



lawlaw o kajina

reciprocal trefoil	a common border used by many weaving groups in the Near and Middle East which resembles borders used for the edge of gardens (plate 43)
rosette	a rosette alternating with a bar, frequently employed by the Jafs (plate 16)
zanbaqi	includes the dahlia flower and its leaves, and the iris, often on a yellow-gold ground (plate 6)



crossed arrows

Heraldic devices

crossed arrows within a square	employed by the Shanbo and the Shaqaqi (plate 68)
"Hakkari-Shanbo *gul*"	a diamond with hooked appendages (plate 65)
"Teshup-Zelan star"	an eight-pointed star used in Central and Northern Kurdistan, deriving from the Hurrian god of weather, Teshup, and the Zelan dynasty (plate 22)



"Hakkari-Shanbo *gul*"



"Teshup-Zelan star"

Talismanic devices

amulets	good luck charms (plate 65)
combs	a symbol of rain (plate 61)
dromedaries	a symbol of good business (plate 59)
ewers	a symbol of purity (plates 59, 61)
falcons	a symbol of leisure (plate 59)



amulets



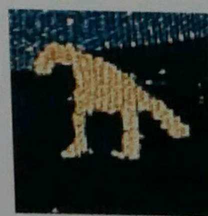
combs

dromedaries



ewers





falcon

Southern Kurdistan



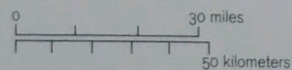






L

above **Map of the main weaving areas of Southern Kurdistan, circa 1835.**

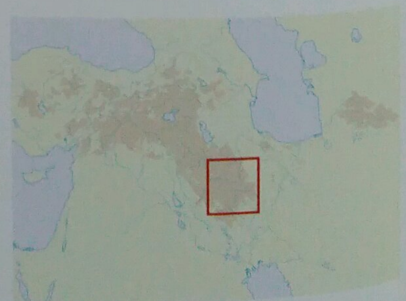


weaving area

area with Kurdish majority (approximate)

major commercial route

Perso-Ottoman line of claims



For thousands of years Southern Kurdistan has had the fortune – good and bad – of straddling perhaps the most important commercial land route in the entire world: the southern branch of the legendary Silk Road. The Silk Road enters Southern Kurdistan and the Zagros Mountains from the Iranian plateau at Hamadan, passes through Kirmanshah, and exits the mountains and Kurdistan into the Mesopotamian plain at Shahraban, only fifty miles northeast of Baghdad.

Although Southern Kurdistan is rugged and mountainous – Mt. Alwand, Mt. Bisitun, and Mt. Shahu all look down on the Silk Road from heights of over 11,000 feet (3,300 meters) – it also contains some of the richest agricultural valleys in all the Middle East. There is an adequate amount of precipitation in the form of rain and snow, which supports intensive rain-watered agriculture, while an abundance of rivers plus some highly reliable and productive springs provide a major surplus of water for the area. Less positively, the temperature can range from as low as -40°F (-40°C) in the winter (even in the cities such as Hamadan), to as high as over 100°F (38°C) in the summertime in Kirmanshah.

The presence of the Silk Road made Southern Kurdistan easily accessible to Persian forces. Since the beginning of the seventeenth century this accessibility, in combination with the great commercial importance of the Silk Road, has made it impossible for the local Kurds to maintain their autonomy: the emirs of Kalhur, and the Sanjabi emirs of Mahidasht, were the last to fall, losing their independence to the Persian Shah Abbas the Great (r. 1588–1629). The end of the rule of the Kurdish princely houses, however, did not mean the end of the Kurdish aristocracy: the native upper classes continued to exist and to demand high quality weavings.

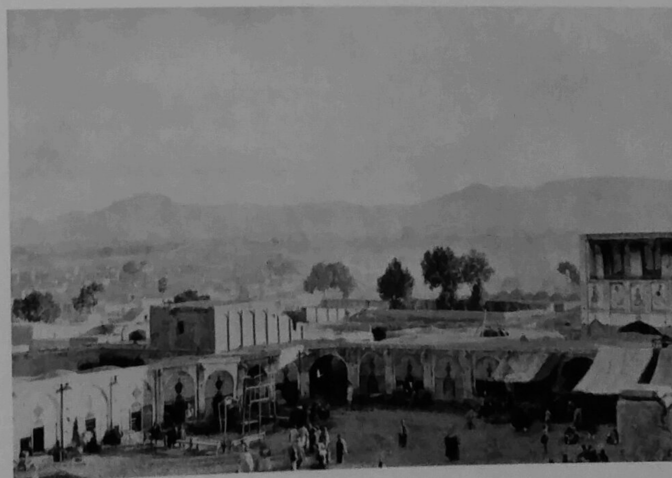
The autonomy of the Kurds in this district waxed and waned through the fall of the Safavid dynasty in 1722 until the early years of Qajar rule (1794–1925). When the Qajar dynasty seized power in Persia in 1794, it quickly established a firm hold on Southern Kurdistan. In 1808 Muhammad Ali, a favorite son of Fath Ali Shah and second in line for the throne after the heir apparent Abbas, was appointed the margrave of the entire western Persian frontier, with his center of government at Kirmanshah. Muhammad Ali established a sumptuous court there and adopted the princely title of "Dawlatshah" to distinguish his line from the rest of the Qajar dynastic line.

Most of the Kurdish clans and tribes encountered today in Southern Kurdistan were in place by the turn of the nineteenth century. Major weaving clans (see map, pages 10–11), listed from east to west, included the Laks, the Koliya'i, the Sanjabi, and the Kalhur. Although Kirmanshah and, to large extent, Hamadan had the economic and administrative power to dominate the area, there is no evidence that Kurds produced weavings in these cities, and they generally served as marketing centers for the rugs produced in their environs.

Laks

The Laks are considered to be Kurds and speak Laki, a southeastern Kurdish dialect distinct from Luri, which is a Persian dialect. Malayir is a city located in the easternmost weaving area of Southern Kurdistan and inside the Laki-speaking

right **The main square in Kirmanshah, Southern Kurdistan, in 1886.**



territories of southeastern Kurdistan. The Malayir area gave rise to the eighteenth-century Zand dynasty of Persia. When the Qajars seized the throne of Persia many Zand tribespeople fled to Central Kurdistan, where they lived with Jaf clans. The Zands, as well as Luri, Persian, Jewish, and Turkoman weavers, have produced rugs in this area for centuries, making it difficult to distinguish Kurdish workmanship.

Koliya'i

The Koliya'i clans, which were primarily nomadic up until the twentieth century, were famous for their fine carpets. Sonqor and Qorva were the principal marketing centers for their weavings: Persian merchants commonly referred to Koliya'i weavings as "Sonqor" because most of them were marketed there. Large *kellegi*-size carpets were woven in workshops in the Koliya'i area in the eighteenth century and presumably earlier. *Mina khani* and shrub-floral designs were popular. Some of these carpets had an all-wool foundation, some had an all-cotton foundation, and some had cotton warps and wool wefts. Some were single-wefted and some had two wefts between each row of knots. They all had a thick handle and lustrous wool.

The Koliya'i utilized sheep wool, cotton, and occasionally camel hair for the foundation of their weavings, sometimes mixing the strands of wool and cotton together. The larger rugs usually contain more cotton in their foundation than the smaller ones, presumably because the large ones were made in urban areas which could more easily afford the more expensive cotton. The nomadic pieces were usually constructed of wool – warp, weft, and pile. When examining old Kurdish rugs, however, it is very apparent that generalities about construction are just that: generalities.

The rugs of the Koliya'i are distinguishable from their Kurdish counterparts to the west and north by their curvilinear designs (more angular in nomadic pieces), which are principally floral-inspired, and by particular shades of yellow and red employed in their color tonality and which are not seen in other Kurdish rugs (see plates 2, 3, and 6).

Sanjabi

The Sanjabi clans are located west of Kirmanshah and their rugs were marketed in Baghdad and Kirmanshah. Sanjabi weavings are distinguished by their construction, which features a cotton warp with one wool weft between each row of knots. Their handle is floppy and they have a dry, modified salt-and-pepper look on the backs. During the rule of Nadir Shah (1736–1747) some Kurds from the Sanjabi area were deported to the Fars area, but many returned during the Zand dynasty (1757–1791).

Kalhur

The Kalhur clan, to the southwest of the Sanjabi, also produced weavings. Like the Sanjabi many of them were deported under the reign of Nadir, but most returned to their homeland after Nadir's death. Over the past three centuries many tribal Kurds have migrated west and north from Southern Kurdistan, making it difficult to identify their work. The Kurds who have remained are mainly sedentary and are losing their Kurdish identity. These circumstances have led to a paucity of information about weavings from this area of Kurdistan.

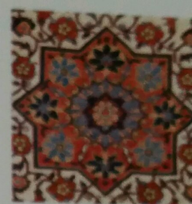


left A mountain range in Southern Kurdistan, as depicted in the late nineteenth century.



1


a


b

Mina Khani and Moon Medallion
Possibly Sonqor, Southern Kurdistan
circa 1800
6'5"x 16'5" (196 x 500 cm)
wool pile on a cotton foundation

The technical and artistic quality of this carpet denotes an urban workshop. An ivory medallion sits upon a field of rosettes and palmettes (a) that form the famous *mina khani* lattice design. The lattice appears to continue into infinity – as though we can only see the section that is framed by the border. The *mina khani* is composed of a series of rows of aster flowers surrounded by circular tendrils, vines, and other flowers; it is used in many areas of southern and eastern Kurdistan and is among the most popular of all Kurdish patterns. The origin of the *mina khani*, like most design origins, is difficult to discern. Sasanian, Chinese, and Byzantine weavers frequently employed flowers in circles of tendrils and vines. The very same background pattern is also seen in Ersari weavings from Turkmenistan. The design as used in Kurdish rugs is traditionally portrayed on a blue field, although some twentieth-century weavers used a red field because madder was cheaper to obtain than indigo. The Persians call a white medallion superimposed on a *mina khani* field a "moon" medallion, shining over the flowers. The medallion here has multiple levels of design: it features a series of rosettes and stars (b), filled in with various flowers. The primary border is composed of a variety of flowers against a red background. Minor borders identical to each other flank the main border. The carpet has a hand-spun all-cotton foundation with one weft between each row of knots.



2

Mina Khani
Koliya'i,
Southern Kurdistan
circa 1800
9'3"x 23'0" (282 x 701 cm)
wool pile on cotton warps
and wool wefts

An exceptionally large and imposing carpet which, like plate 1, was probably made in an urban workshop for a wealthy client. The lack of a central medallion is not unusual and allows us to admire the remarkable beauty of the *mina khani* lattice in its uninterrupted and perfectly drawn regularity. Examining a single section of the lattice, we see a yellow "vine" forming ovals (a) and quatrefoils (b). The ovals are flanked by four red asters and each contains a large "ragged" flower-head flanked by four small white ones and six "cloudbands"; each quatrefoil has a yellow flower. This is the typical palette and format of the *mina khani* lattice on rugs from Southern Kurdistan. The ground of the main border is a particularly rich and beautiful shade of yellow. The quality of the rug overall is enhanced by its fine weave.


a


b




a

3

Mina Khani
Koliya'i,
Southern Kurdistan
early 19th century
3′8″ x 6′11″ (112 x 211 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The field of this nomadic rug is an enlarged section of the *mina khani* lattice. The stem joining together the rosettes forms an overall lattice of rows of circles. The flowers themselves are boldly drawn and the beauty of their colors gives the impression that the lattice is floating above the deep slate-blue ground. The distinctive floral border (a) is called the "butterfly" border: the flowers, viewed side-on, are arrayed along a continuous meandering stem and point alternately inward and outward, resembling a butterfly with its antennae. Characteristic of Koliya'i nomadic weavings is the narrow band of red weft-faced plainweave at each end, brocaded with a single line of natural brown and ivory wool. The rug is double-wefted and has a thick, floppy handle. The pile is glossy and the colors, typical of Koliya'i nomadic weaving, are rich and saturated. As is often found on tribal weavings, the brown dyed wool has corroded due to the presence of iron in the mordant. A similar rug recently on the New York market is dated 1227 AH (AD 1812–13).



4



a

Mina Khani with Cloudbands
Koliya'i,
Southern Kurdistan
mid-19th century
4'0"x 8'7"(122 x 262 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

This is a typically tribal treatment of an ancient pattern of linked flowers on a dark blue ground, almost playful in its abandonment of strict regularity. Tribal weavers tended to prefer angular "drawing" to curvilinear designs, and here the beautifully drawn ovals and quatrefoils of the urban vision are replaced by an angular "broken" lattice of almost casual design. The large, unevenly drawn flower-heads follow roughly the design relationship of the motifs in the *mina khani* lattice, but their boldness of color is of primary significance. Rather than having an obvious major border flanked by guards, the rug features three narrow borders (a) of roughly equal width. The inner border, with its meander on an ivory ground, is striking, and the central border has a floral pattern found on tribal and village rugs from many areas of Persia. The rug has narrow plainweave ends brocaded in wool of two colors.





a

5

Red Field with Butterfly Border
Koliya'i,
Southern Kurdistan
mid-19th century
3′7″x 6′11″(109 x 211 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

A plain field is not often found on Kurdish rugs, whose weavers – like their tribal cousins all over Persia – usually tried to cover every available inch of space with a wide repertoire of abstract, floral, and zoomorphic motifs. Similar plain-field rugs are usually associated with the Talish region of Lenkoran in the southeastern Caucasus.

Within the context of Caucasian weavings, such plain-field rugs are referred to as having the *met hane* design. The variation in the shades of red seen on this rug is called abrash and is caused by the use of different batches of wool dyed with natural substances, in this instance madder. These variations in tone were much admired by nomadic weavers, and in this piece enhance the beauty while eliminating the tedium of the single color in the field. The bold drawing of the floral motifs in the "butterfly" border (a) and the brilliant ivory ground both constitute a dramatic contrast with the field. Like plate 3, this rug has narrow ends of red weft-faced plainweave and the warps have been plaited at one end.



6

Shrubs in Lattice
Koliya'i,
Southern Kurdistan
18th century
8'0" x 15'0" (244 x 457 cm)
wool pile on a wool
foundation

An overall diamond lattice, each component of which contains a flowering shrub pointing in one direction, is one of the most popular and ubiquitous designs found on oriental carpets. It is seen on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Safavid Persian and Mughal Indian carpets of the highest quality. There is no clear indication of where this design originated. Any danger of monotony is overcome both by the beauty and color of the individual shrubs and, most importantly, by their apparently random arrangement. The main border (a), of dahlias with angular leaves alternating with irises, is called the *zanbaqi* pattern; it is often seen on older Southern Kurdish rugs as well as on later commercial examples from Garrus and Senna. This rug has an all-wool foundation and is single-wefted. Rugs with similar designs are made by the neighboring Bakhtiari, but these differ in weave and color.


a

overleaf detail of plate 6



7


a


b

Offset Rows of Shrubs
Koliya'i,
Southern Kurdistan
circa 1800
4′2″ x 8′11″ (127 x 272 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The field design is composed of rows of ascending shrubs against a dark blue background. The individual shrubs each form a diamond shape. Although they are not placed in an actual lattice, as seen in plate 6, this is implied both by the slightly angular form of the shrubs and by their offset placement. This rug is probably later in date than the one in plate 6; a comparison between the shrubs in plate 6 (a) and the present example (b) shows how they have become simplified and more geometric in outline. The leaf and flower elements of the *zanbaqi* border are also tending toward the non-representational.



8



a

Medallions and Shrubs
Koliya'i,
Southern Kurdistan
mid-19th century
3′0″x 6′2″(92 x 188 cm)
wool pile on wool warps
and cotton wefts

The pattern is composed of three large medallions, the central red one predominant, with large shrubs placed between them. The combination of medallions and flowering shrubs can also be found on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century rugs from Persia and India.

It is probable that this combination is meant to represent a stylized garden with pools. It is interesting that some weavers in the Caucasus refer to such medallions as *guls*, meaning not "flowers," the interpretation favored by writers on Turkoman weavings, but "lakes," the alternative meaning of the word in several Turkic languages. From the sides of each medallion, trefoliate leaf stems (a) point diagonally downwards. Although it is perhaps later in date than the Koliya'i rugs illustrated in plates 6 and 7, both its color and its drawing make this example outstanding.





a

9

Six Avatars
Kandula,
Southern Kurdistan
late 19th century
3′8″ x 5′5″ (112 x 165 cm)
wool pile on wool warps
and camel hair wefts

A small rug attributed to the village of Kandula in Southern Kurdistan, southwest of Songor. It was presumably made by Kurds of the Ahl-i-Haqq (Yarsani) religion, a sect of the "Cult of Angels." The motifs floating in the center of the camel field have a religious significance: they represent the six avatars, a multi-personal representation of the divinity similar in concept to the Christian Trinity. The six are Moses, Jesus Christ, Noah, Mithra, Sultan Sahak, and the female avatar Dayrak. The wide white ground border has a series of alternating floral-like motifs, a characteristic south Kurdish design symbolizing turtles, used to pay homage to Khidir. These are executed in a more floral, less geometric manner than the border turtles depicted on rugs from further north, such as plate 23 (a). A variation of this "turtle" border is later found on many rugs made in the commercial workshops established in northwest Persia by European entrepreneurs from the 1880s onwards, especially those from Garrus and Senna (see plate 32).



10



a

Chevrons of Flowers
Sanjabi,
Southern Kurdistan
late 19th century
2'11"x 2'8"(89 x 81 cm)
wool pile on cotton warps
and wool wefts

This saddle-cover, woven by the Sanjabi Kurds, has had its hole and slit for the pommel and cantle respectively filled in. The small tri-form shrubs (a) are actually arranged in straightforward diagonal rows on the cover's field; however, by brilliant chromatic patterning the effect is that of a chevron. Such "patterning by color" was a device frequently used by tribal weavers to give visual dynamism to an otherwise rather monotonous design. As is normal for Sanjabi weavings, it has a somewhat harsh, dry handle to its salt-and-pepper back, similar to that of Senna rugs. It should be noted that the equine culture in the Middle East is a very ancient one, predating Islam, and most tribal groups produced a wide variety of beautifully woven artifacts o decorate their horses. A book by Parvis Tanavoli (1998) is devoted specifically to Persian horse culture and includes some Kurdish weavings.



11

Diagonal Lattice of Stepped Diamonds
West of Shiraz, Fars province, southwest Persia
second half of the 19th century
6′1″ x 14′0″ (185 x 427 cm)
kilim, tapestry weave in wool

This flatweave rug (called a "kilim," made in the so-called slit-tapestry technique) has a design of interlocking stepped diamonds that completely cover the field. It is the work of Sanjabi Kurds who were deported to the southwest Persian province of Fars in the eighteenth century. Fars is the homeland of a large number of different tribes, all of whom have produced their own distinctive weavings. It is interesting to speculate on the relationship between the design on this kilim and those seen on the rugs in plates 6 and 7. It is arguable that this is the same basic design, reduced to complete abstraction and relying for its effect on brilliant colors. The color of each serrated diamond seems to resolve itself into a series of larger interlocking diamond medallions. Kilims were made by several of the great tribal groups of Fars, particularly the Qashqa'i and Lors. Old examples by the Kurds of Fars, such as this one, are comparatively rare.

Central Kurdistan







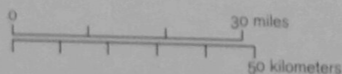


J

Central Kurdistan is the smallest of all the divisions of Kurdistan and, except for its eastern mountainous areas, the most exposed to outside forces. Historically it was located in the area known as Mesopotamia (see map on following page). The principal Kurdish clans that reside in Central Kurdistan and whose antique weavings I can identify are the Jaf tribes, the Diza'i, and the Herki. There were also hundreds of smaller Kurdish groups that produced weavings.

Badinan
Shamdinan
Herki
Ushnu
Lake Urmia
Miyan Do'ab
Dahuk
Naqadeh
Revand
Daryas
Revanduz
Sa'uj Bulagh (Mahabad)
to Tabriz
Shaykhan
SORAN PRINCIPALITY
Girdi
Shaqlawa
Mukrian
Nabi Yunis
Mosul
Greater Zab
Rania
to Aleppo
Arbil
Soran
Mantik
PERSIAN EMPIRE
Sardasht
Koy Sanjaq
Lesser Zab
Sharbazar
Diza'i
Diza'i
Dargazia
Shahrbazar
Sulaimani
Khava
Altun Kupru
Panchwin
Lake Zerivar
Sulaymania
Kirkuk
Chamehamal
Barzanja
Marivan
Bazian
Taza Khurmatu
Sharazur
Gulanbar
Tigris
Qadir Karim
Awraman
MAMLUK PRINCIPALITY OF IRAQ
BABAN PRINCIPALITY
Halabja
Tawuq
Jaf
Zaradagh
Sirwan
Garmiyan
Pawa
Darband
Tikrit
Tuz Khurmatu
Aaq Su
ARDALAN PRINCIPALITY
Diyala
to Baghdad
Quratu

above **Map of the main weaving areas of Central Kurdistan, circa 1835.**

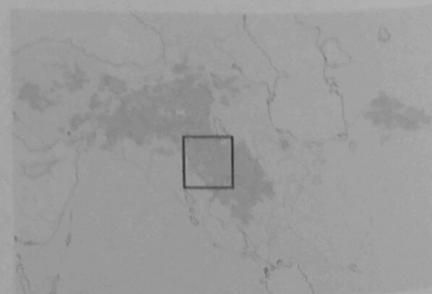


weaving area

area with Kurdish majority (approximate)

major commercial route

Perso-Ottoman line of claims



Under Ottoman rule, Mesopotamia was divided into three provinces: Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul. Basra and Baghdad, known as Lower Mesopotamia and in the nineteenth century as the Mamluk principality of Iraq, consisted of the area from the Persian Gulf to Samara; the population is mostly Arab. The northern province of Mosul, that which we designate as Central Kurdistan, is found in present-day northern Iraq. It contains large areas of hilly country, which were generally occupied by Kurds. Historically this area was part of Upper Mesopotamia, an area that comprised the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the desert area west of the Tigris. East of the Tigris, the hills are drained by several large rivers, including the Greater Zab and the Lesser Zab. South of the Lesser Zab is the Kurdish city of Sulaymania, the old capital of the Baban confederacy. The Babans were not a nomadic weaving clan: they were the religious rulers of the Jaf clans until the late nineteenth century.

Central Kurdistan has lower elevations than the rest of Kurdistan, and except for the northeast corner its topography is hilly rather than mountainous. As a result it has more benign winters. Although there are wooded mountainous areas in the east and north (on the current Iraqi borders with Iran and Turkey), the rest of the area is grassland. In the high summer and fall, nearly all the grasslands dry up, forcing the nomads to seek fodder for their ample flocks in the highest elevations and the woodlands. Many tribes regularly migrated into the Zagros and Taurus Mountains in search of fresh grass, and some even took up permanent residence there. As a result nearly every Kurdish clan resident in Central Kurdistan has a counterpart in the neighboring districts of Eastern or Northern Kurdistan, leading to understandable confusion for ethnographers, historians, and rug collectors. For example, one finds Jaf tribes not only in their original homeland in Central Kurdistan around Sulaymania, but also in Southern Kurdistan (at Sarpuli Zohab and Jawanrud) and Eastern Kurdistan (between Garrus and Sa'uj Bulagh). The Herki tribes, found in Central Kurdistan, extend as far north as the Hakkari Heights in Northern Kurdistan as well as into Iran.

The vast numbers of nomads who coveted and benefited from Central Kurdistan's relatively warm winter climate, with its rich winter pastureland, caused the cultural traditions of Central Kurdistan to become intermingled with those of Eastern, Northern, and Southern Kurdistan. This is most apparent in the similarity of customs and costumes that exists between those districts of Kurdistan.

Central Kurdistan is linguistically and religiously a very heterogeneous society. Every major dialect of Kurdish is spoken here, including those otherwise found only on the extreme ends of this vast mountainous land. Every religion and creed practiced by Kurds is also present in Central Kurdistan. Up until the creation of Israel, this area also boasted the largest Jewish community in Kurdistan. Jews outnumbered Christians in the area, with many communities dotted over the land.[16] There was (and is) a large population of Turkomans from Central Asia concentrated on the western fringes of the land, sandwiched between the Kurds and the Arabs whose ethnic borders coincide with the natural division between the mountains and the plain.



left An officer of the Pasha of Sulaymania, Central Kurdistan, in 1835.

right Man of the Jaf tribe, Central Kurdistan.



Major cities of the region – some of them over four thousand years old – include Arbil, Kirkuk, and Sulaymania. Mosul (located across the Tigris river from ancient Nineveh, the site of the modern Kurdish town of Nabi Yunis) has been the dominant city in the area for centuries. It is not Kurdish in either character or population, but today, as for centuries past, the non-Kurds are a majority only within the confines of the city itself: the surrounding countryside remains mainly Kurdish. For centuries the great commercial emporium of Mosul was the marketplace for many Kurdish goods. A great portion of the finer Kurdish flatweaves and rugs from Eastern and Central Kurdistan ended up in the markets of Mosul, where they were displayed, sold, and exported to distant markets. Prior to the decline of the Silk Road, Mosul was in an advantageous position: not only was it on the primary trunk line but it also served as the terminal point of a secondary spur that branched off from the main Qazvin–Sultaniya road, passing through Garrus, Sa'uj Bulagh, Revanduz, and Arbil before ending at Mosul. Later, after traffic on the Silk Road had ceased to be an economic factor, Mosul benefited because it was geographically closer than Baghdad to the Mediterranean sea ports and thus to Europe, allowing it to eclipse Baghdad in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Among the major clan confederacies in the nineteenth century (see map, pages 10–11) were the Herki, the Girdi, the Khushnaw, the Pizhdar, the Diza'i, the Chigini, the Hamawand, the Talabani, the Kaka'i, the Zangana, the Gizha, and the Jafs. All of these clans produced weavings, primarily for domestic use but also for sale. The local Kurdish elite procured fine rugs from the established quality rug centers of Senna, Garrus, Sa'uj Bulagh, and Kirmanshah. The Baban princes preferred high quality Jaf rugs, while the Soran princes commissioned excellent Diza'i rugs designed to please their aesthetic taste. The khans of the tribal confederacies were second only to the princes in their wealth and their desire for excellent Kurdish pieces.

It is hard to verify whether rug-producing workshops ever existed in Mosul or Baghdad. The Kurdish highlands to the northeast of both Baghdad and Mosul provided ample raw material – wool, cotton, dyes – as well as skilled weavers, at a cheap cost, for the production of rugs for those two major urban markets.

During the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, significant epidemics befell Baghdad, Mosul, and other areas of Central and Eastern Kurdistan. There was a repeated pattern of a severe summer drought followed by famine followed by epidemics, largely of cholera but also of smallpox. Cholera epidemics, each of which caused tens of thousands of deaths, were recorded in 1687–88, 1719–20, and 1772. In 1831 cholera again struck Baghdad and moved eastward, causing thousands of inhabitants to perish: the old Baban capital of Sulaymania and its surrounding villages were wiped out. J. Baillie Fraser, an English cleric who visited the eastern mountains of Central Kurdistan and the city of Sulaymania in 1834, related that

The Roostum Beg [a Kurdish leader] . . . joined with others in lamenting the evil days on which the present Koords had fallen. "The golden times of Koordistan are gone," he said; "ride over the country and what brilliance, what



left **A Jaf tribal leader and his retinue, photographed by the Rev. Paul Gray in 1891.**

spirit will you find? All the good horsemen and stout soldiers are dead, or have fled the land, or have taken to the plow per force to . . . feed their wives and children . . ." I agreed with him in thinking that the country had lost all appearance of prosperity, and the people all spirit and brilliancy.[17]

These epidemics may be one reason for the paucity of antique Central Kurdish rugs available today. Quality rug production is dependent upon the people's prosperity, and that was probably diminished along with these thousands of lives. Another reason may be that the milder climate of Central Kurdistan dictated that kilims were the major weaving product.

Jaf

The large and powerful Jaf clans inhabited and still inhabit the west side of the Zagros Mountains extending into Iran. The southern reach of their territory extends to the northwest side of Kirmanshah, where they are called Jawanrud Jafs; to the north their lands extend to the northwest of Senna. Claudius J. Rich visited the Jafs in 1820 and related that

The Jaf tribe . . . are a fine-looking, brave people, but esteemed exceedingly uncivilized and barbarous, even by the Koords. As they are a strong and powerful tribe, they have a number of refugees from various tribes, with remnants of broken tribes, under their protection . . . The Jafs all live in tents. In the summer they encamp in the high mountains . . . in the autumn they are scattered over the district . . . and in the winter they live . . . on the river Diala.[18]

The Jafs mostly wove small bags (*hagba*) which were meant to hang on the flanks of their horses (see plate 16), large bags (*khoori*) for carrying their goods on donkeys, and kilims. Being nomads they did not weave many large carpets as these would hamper them on their migrations. The larger carpets they did weave were made for their own use, rather than for sale. The Jafs were formidable warriors and the mountains they lived in were relatively inaccessible to the Persians and the Ottomans (just as they were to the Industrial Revolution and the rest of the world). As a result it was not until around 1820 that the various Jaf tribes came under the direct influence of the Ottomans and Persians.

In a 1999 conversation with this author, Jalal Jaff, an elder statesman of the Jafs who formerly resided in Halabja and lived in London when we spoke, stated that Shah Riza Pahlavi's 1926 restrictions preventing the Jafs' summer migrations to the Zagros high pastures in Iran destroyed the Jafs' tribal life. By closing the Iran–Iraq border to the Jafs, the Shah indirectly caused the deaths of thousands of tribal Jafs who could not adapt to sedentary life. This disruption in the nomads' migrational destinations caused a flood of now unneeded Jaf bags to come onto the marketplace in the late 1920s and 1930s, as William Eagleton pointed out in his excellent book on Kurdish rugs.[19] Jalal Jaff relates that in the aftermath of the Iran–Iraq War of the 1980s and the 1991 Gulf War, the Jaf Kurds were decimated, both economically and as a people, by the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. This resulted in another mass sale of Jaf bags, as the Jafs were forced to dispose of their heritage to keep starvation at bay.

Jaf weavers utilized the finest wool dyed with rich, bright, harmonizing colors. Father Campanile, a cleric who traveled in Kurdistan in 1802, related that the sheep near Sulaymania were superior to those of any other Kurdish area he had visited,



right **A Kurdish family in Central Kurdistan in the 1950s.**

and that the Jafs' pride was evident in their workmanship.[20] The old weavings from the many Jaf tribes are fairly consistent, with all-wool construction and a similar use of color. The warps are usually natural ivory or brown wool. The wool wefts (occasionally goat hair) can be natural brown or ivory, or dyed yellow, blue, or red. The backs are flat without depression. Many Jaf weavers employ offset knotting in the field, whereby each row of knots is tied on alternating warps, one warp to the left or right of the previous row. This allows them to weave the sharply angled, steeply diagonal diamond designs that so many of their bags feature. Other Jaf weavers, however, do not employ offset knotting. The differences in knotting and in the colors employed in the wefting may assist us in identifying the Jaf tribes responsible for a particular weaving. Many of the Jaf bags I have examined have one or more minor borders consisting of characteristic rosettes with bars between them.

When Father Campanile visited the Baban territory (the homeland of the Jafs) he deemed it to be the largest, the most powerful and the most cultivated principality of Kurdistan.[21] Madder grew in its fertile plains, fruit was abundant, and its gardens featured pools and fish ponds amidst willow trees. Less than twenty years later, when Claudius J. Rich traveled to Sulaymania in 1820, the territory was still nominally ruled by the Babans, but more control was exercised by the Ottomans and the Persians. The Pasha of Sulaymania described to Rich:

... the difficulties ... of being placed on the frontier of two rival powers, one of which never ceased persecuting him for contributions, the other ... insisted that he should neither serve nor pay Persia; and yet [Ottoman] Turkey was neither able nor willing to defend him when the Shahzadeh of Kirmanshah carried out his extractions by force. He pointed out the pernicious way in which this combination operated on the prosperity of the country.[22]

In 1832 Fraser described the many difficulties that had made Sulaymania prey to

... an accumulation of misfortunes, which have reduced it to extreme misery. First came family disputes, civil wars ... This brought in foreign intervention ... and on unfortunate Sulaymania the maintenance of a Persian army, in addition to the payment of a Persian tribute. Then came the plague, which carried off more than half the people of town and country; and, of the remaining half all that could ... emigrated to where burthens are lighter ...[23]

Diza'i

The Arbil plain, where Alexander the Great defeated Darius III, King of the Persians, in 332 BC, has been the home of the Diza'i nomadic tribes for centuries (they were mentioned by Pliny the Elder almost two thousand years ago). Their weaving is distinguishable by its beige cotton warps and tan wool or ivory cotton wefts, sometimes mixed, giving a salt-and-pepper appearance to the back. As with most Kurdish weavings, there are generally two wefts between each row of knots. The city of Arbil was the seat of the Soran principality; the Sorans, like the Babans, were religious and political leaders, not tribespeople.

Herki

The Herki (called Haraki or Harki in Persia where some of them lived) were one of the largest nomadic tribes of Kurdistan, whose territory extended from the area north of Arbil in Central Kurdistan north to the southern edge of the Hakkari Heights in Northern Kurdistan. Each summer

right **A mountain sheep belonging to the Herki clan, sketched by Father Campanile in Central Kurdistan in 1802.**





above Kurds with their tents and goats, photographed by the Rev. Paul Gray in the Revanduz area, Central Kurdistan, in 1891.

they took their sheep and goats from their homeland, looking for cool pastures as far north as the plateau of Urmia. In the winter they migrated to the plains of Mosul and Arbil in search of grass. The local inhabitants who lived in the path of their migration dreaded the Herki journey and would stand guard over their flocks and crops until the nomads had passed by.

Herki weavings, like those of other Kurdish groups, contained many amulets and devices to ensure good luck. The Herki often weave identifiable devices into their work, such as the eight-pointed star, an ancient symbol of the Hurrian weather god Teshup (also called the star of Zelan, the Zelan being a dynasty which ruled in these mountains just over two thousand years ago),[24] and a diamond shape with four extruding hooks which was a heraldic device found in weavings from the Hakkari Mountains and associated with the Shanbo dynasty.[25] As related in the Appendix essay, the Hurrians were considered the aborigines of Kurdistan, and this mountainous area – where the Herki have resided since time immemorial – is thought to be where they lived. The word Herki is actually an etymological evolution of the term Hurrian.[26]

Although the Herki have been nominally Sunni Muslims since the sixteenth century, they still revere old native Kurdish Yazdani deities and holy figures, and the majority of them are followers of Sufi orders. Herki sometimes employ a representation of the land turtle in the borders of their weavings as a symbol of Khidir, the "old man of the ponds" and Noah's assistant (as discussed above, in "The Identification of Kurdish Weaving").



12


a


b


c

Hexagons and Medallions
Jaf, Central Kurdistan
first half of the 19th century
4'10"x 8'0" (147 x 244 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Examples by the Jaf Kurds are now among the most highly prized of all Kurdish weavings among Western collectors, primarily because of their wonderfully lustrous wool and brilliant range of colors. The four large red-ground hexagons (a) with white hooked outlines are typical Jaf motifs, while the way every available inch of space is packed with a vast miscellany of ornaments (surrounding the large central medallions arranged in a row down the field) is typical of tribal weavings. Quadrupeds (b), piled in red and ivory and probably representing goats, are also characteristic of tribal weaving; they are arranged here so as to render the overall design uni-directional. The diagonal diamond pattern seen here in the main border often appears in the field of Jaf bags (see plate 16). The outer guard has a "rosette and bar" (c) repeat often found on Jaf weavings (see plates 13–16). The rug has an all-wool foundation, offset knotting, and a richly dyed pile of thick, glossy wool, all characteristic of Jaf Kurd weaving.




a


b

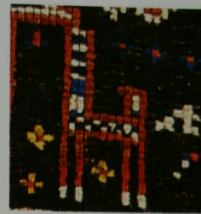
13

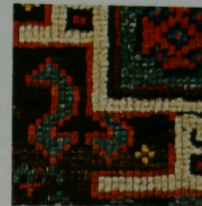
Diagonal Rows of Flowers
Jaf, Central Kurdistan
first half of the 19th century
3′9″x 6′4″(114 x 193 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The field design of this rug consists of lustrous colored diagonal bars each containing a single row of flowering shrubs (a). It is a popular format for weavers of northwest Persian and Caucasian rugs. This piece, although it features field and border designs often associated with Caucasian weavings, has the construction characteristics of the Jafs. The minor border pattern (b) is typical of Jaf weavings, as are the thick and lustrous wool pile and the vivid palette.



14


a


b

Six Medallions
Jaf, Central Kurdistan
mid-19th century
3′11″x 10′3″ (119 x 313 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Like the rug illustrated in plate 8, the design combines fairly naturalistic flora – the flowering shrubs in three of the six medallions – with large colored medallions in what is probably a highly stylized rendering of a garden with ponds. As on the Jaf rug illustrated in plate 12, the placement of animals makes the design unidirectional; the two at the base (a) probably represent goats, and the two birds (b) flanking the topmost medallion are probably ducks or swans. The complex pattern in the main yellow-ground border is probably a version of the *zanbaqi* pattern seen in the borders of plates 6 and 7. The characteristic "rosette and bar" outer border, the thick, lustrous pile, and the brilliant, divers palette indicate a Jaf Kurd origin.



15



a



b

Coffered Guls
Probably Jaf,
Central Kurdistan
circa 1800
5′2″ x 9′1″ (159 x 382 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Compared to some other Jaf weavings, this rug, in terms of its design, seems somewhat formalized. The field design consists of fourteen rows of three conjoined hexagons, with small quartered diamonds in the interstices (a). The hexagons each contain an octagon with hooked outline (the so-called "Memling *gul*") which in turn contains a hooked diamond at its center. This overall design is found on a wide variety of rugs, from Anatolia to East Turkestan and China. The main border contains what seems to be another variant of the *zanbaqi* pattern (see plates 6 and 7). In the ivory guards there is the familiar Jaf "rosette and bar" repeat, although here, as a variation, the rosettes are bracketed in overlapping groups of three in the long borders (b). As usual, the borders are more indicative of the weaving group than is the field. This example could have been woven by some group other than the Jafs in the southern part of Central Kurdistan.





a

16

Diagonal Diamonds
Jaf, Central Kurdistan
mid-19th century
2'0"x 3'4" (61 x 102 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation (front)

Jaf Kurd bags are now among the most highly prized of all tribal weavings, particularly among North American collectors, several of whom have acquired large groups of them. This interest has been encouraged partly by the fact that such pieces were made for the weaver's own use. They have come on the market because the Jafs' nomadic lifestyle has been curtailed by political events over the past seventy years. These troubles have forced many Kurds to sell old and valued family possessions simply as a matter of survival. The repeated diamond pattern seen here is found on the majority of old Jaf bags, and the outer "rosette and bar" pattern is also typical. This example, almost certainly half a double saddlebag, retains its beautiful back, woven with two wide bands of stylized trees (a) in slit-tapestry (kilim) technique between narrower bands of weft-float brocade. Note the similarity of the "tree" motifs to those on the Jaf kilim in plate 19.




a

17

Bands of Triple Umbrella Flowers
Jaf, Central Kurdistan
mid-19th century
5′2″x 9′1″(158 x 277 cm)
kilim, tapestry weave in cotton and wool

Attributable to the environs of Sulaymania, where it would have been both woven and marketed, this flatwoven kilim was made by the Jafs. Most of the similar examples that I have examined have wide horizontal bands of contrasting color, with rows of large "triple umbrella" floral motifs (a) in each band; between each wide band is a narrower one of contrasting color containing a floral meander. The outer border, with its reciprocal trefoil pattern, is common on Jaf kilims. Kilims, which were not traditionally acquired by collectors in the West, have in recent years become keenly appreciated for their bold original designs, and as tribal artifacts. This kilim, like the majority of old examples, has been heavily used, as can be seen clearly by its distressed condition. Even so, it is a superb and rare weaving of its kind, and its condition is an indication of the important part it played in the life of its first owner.



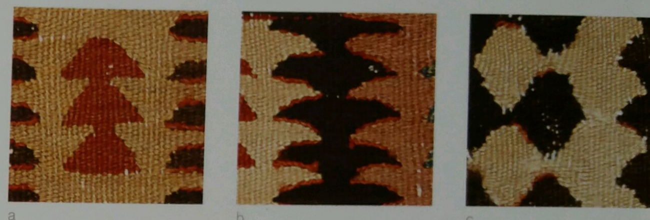
18

Eye Dazzler
Jaf, Central Kurdistan
late 19th century
5′10″ x 10′10″
(178 x 330 cm)
kilim, tapestry weave
in cotton and wool

An attractive kilim, representing a design type known for obvious reasons as an "eye dazzler." The best examples can have as devastating an effect on the beholder's sense of focus as do the "op-art" paintings of Western artists. The pattern is used on the flatwoven sections that join Jaf bags (see plate 16), and can also be seen in some of the earliest wool kilims from Central Asia (see Abegg Stiftung, 2001, pp. 130–31, fig. 27). Although seemingly a simple design of rows of horizontal bands of vividly contrasting colors, each row contains a single row of highly abstracted tree motifs (perhaps firs or cedars). There is nothing casual about either the chromatic patterning or the arrangement of the "trees." The kilims of this type that I have seen – and they are comparatively rare – have an almost mathematical precision. Here, taking the yellow-ground band as a focal point, if the illustration is held a few feet away and the viewer's focus relaxed, a series of vertically elongated, interlocking hexagons appears, each with the same interior decoration. To achieve this effect requires a highly sophisticated approach to abstract design – which explains why such weavings are so admired by many contemporary Western painters.



19


a b c

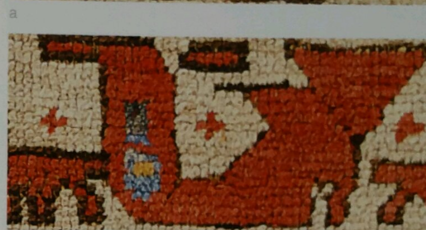
Triple Umbrella Flowers in Diagonal Bands
Jaf, Central Kurdistan
mid-19th century
6'0"x 9'7" (182 x 292 cm)
kilim, tapestry weave
in cotton and wool

The colors and design principles of this kilim clearly relate it to plate 17. The "triple umbrella" motifs found in the bands of that example are here found in somewhat simplified form within each "block" (a). The "tree" motifs seen on the back of the bag in plate 16 are here found in a narrower and more elongated form (b). Worked in brown, they form the outside vertical edges of the "blocks" and thus together form a series of continuous narrow, vertical, tree-like dividing bands between each row of rectangles. The beautifully drawn reciprocal trefoil border (c) is typical of tribal kilims from this area. On this example there is a narrow band of brocading at each end, characteristic of kilims from the Sulaymania region.





a



b

20

Stepped Diamonds and Plants
Diza'i, Central Kurdistan
mid-19th century
3'11" x 5'8" (119 x 173 cm)
wool pile on cotton warps and wool wefts

This tribal weaving by the Diza'i clan, south of Arbil, possesses a simplicity in both its design and its repertoire of motifs that makes it reminiscent of many west Persian weavings produced in village workshops. The six contrasting floral motifs in two rows at the bottom of the field remind one of the six avatars on the field of plate 9, and they may also have a religious significance here. The design in the ivory-ground border is most interesting. On the long sides (a) it resembles the *shudur* ("almond flower") pattern found on a wide variety of tribal weavings; at the top and bottom (b), however, the design seems to take on a more zoomorphic appearance. The construction of this rug – cotton warps, wefts of double-twisted mixed wool and cotton, and a salt-and-pepper back with some offset wefting – helps in making an attribution to the Diza'i area. Later pieces from the same region have similar designs but lack the rich palette of this example.



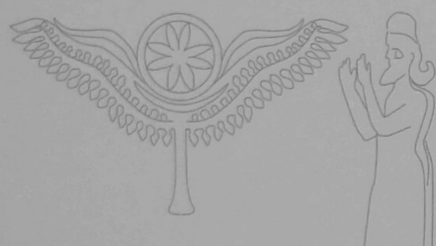
21

Blue Totem on Red
Arbil area,
Central Kurdistan
18th century
4'5"x 13'4"(135 x 406 cm)
kilim, tapestry weave in cotton, wool, and goat hair

A rare kilim with a sparse but powerful design in which the abrash of the plainweave ground plays a major part. The central "pole" medallion with six diamonds of varying sizes and "arrow-head" finials may well have had a totemic significance for the weaver. The materials used for the warps include sheep's wool, goat hair, and cotton plied together, a not unusual combination in tribal weaving. At the top end the warps are plaited, a traditional Kurdish method of end finishing. This kilim was purchased in Arbil from a mountain Kurd who reputedly lived nearby. I know of no comparable Kurdish flatweave, but it is stylistically reminiscent of the thick *gabbeh* rugs woven by the Qashqa'i, Lors, and other tribes from Fars. A pile rug of similar design, color, and format was illustrated by Eberhart Herrmann (1986, pp. 142–43, pl. 63).



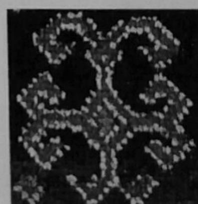




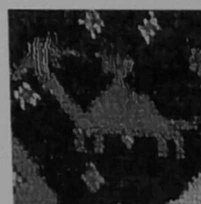


Three Hurrian cylinder seal impressions. Above: King Ithi-Teshup, Central Kurdistan, circa fourteenth century BC, wearing a crown depicting the eight-pointed symbol of the Hurrian god Teshup. Left: The Mittani King Saushtatar, circa 1500 BC, worshiping the symbol of Teshup. Right: From Ugarit, northwest Syria, showing the Star of Teshup used as a votive device.

22



a



b

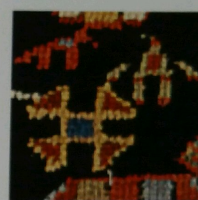
Three Medallions with Heraldic Device
Probably Herki,
Central Kurdistan
18th century
4′5″x 5′11″ (135 x 180 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The bold and simple design and the basic color selection of this tribal rug are indicative of eighteenth-century Kurdish work. The field is divided into three compartments by two pairs of bars jutting in from the inner border.
Each compartment contains a large diamond formed by a hooked Shanbo-design outline. The medallions and the field on which they rest share the same dark blue ground. Each medallion contains an octagon within which is a quartered eight-pointed star; the star motif is repeated in the outer borders, which are missing from both ends. According to William Eagleton (1988, p. 84), a Kurdish weaver he interviewed called the diamond with hooked devices, depicted on this rug, the "Herki *gul*." We see this *gul* (a) in Herki weavings of Northern Kurdistan, and in Shanbo confederation and Shaqaqi iconography (see plates 56 and 66). The eight-pointed star is thought by the Kurds to be an interpretation of the Star of Teshup, which has an ancient history in Central and Northern Kurdistan (see illustrations above). Note the red dromedary (b) in the bottom diamond, and the way the inner border forms a V-shaped indentation at its base with a small motif within it resembling the hooked motif at the top and bottom of each large diamond. This suggests an attempt at the concept of the endless repeat. The rug has a thick, curly pile and a foundation of natural brown wool, with three weft threads between each row of knots.





a



b

23

Three Abyss Medallions
Herki, Central Kurdistan
circa 1800
2′10″ x 10′5″ (86 x 318 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The long narrow field of this rug features three main medallions surrounded by myriad geometric motifs, stylized trees, animals (a) (probably goats or sheep), and, flanking the lower part of the bottom medallion, what seem to be two tiny human figures, each with a horse or dog (b). This is a stylized garden design. The form of the medallions seen here is said to represent an abyss (*hauzi*), where Khidir lives according to followers of the Yazdani native Kurdish religion. The main border of this rug consists of repeated representations of the Herki version of the land turtle, which also reflects the symbolism of Khidir and represents everlasting life.




a

24

Sikh Kababi
Herki, Central Kurdistan
circa 1800
3′1″ x 11′9″ (94 x 358 cm)
wool pile on wool warps
and cotton wefts

This design of diagonal crossed forms is called *sikh kababi* by Persian carpet dealers as it resembles kebab skewers. In the version seen here large serrated leaves surround the centrally placed stylized flower-head, in the form of an octagon with eight tiny "birds." The principal border, with its version of the "turtle" design (a), is similar to that seen on plate 23; the three tiny diamonds on each turtle's back are intended to represent a real turtle's shell plates and constitute part of the iconography of Herki weaving. Both the wool quality and the construction reinforce this attribution to the Herki.



25

overleaf: detail of plate 25

Hexagons with Guls
Herki, near Hakkari Heights, Central or Northern Kurdistan
18th century
3'7"x 8'0"(109 x 245 cm)
incomplete, wool pile on a wool foundation

This appears to be a very old design that continued to be in popular use through the nineteenth century. It consists of horizontal bands of hexagons separated by totemic representations of two birds facing a tree. Each of the hexagons is filled with a central diamond with large protruding hooks. The border also includes motifs representing birds. This carpet was probably woven by Herki Kurds in their ancestral domain, which extended from just south of the Hakkari Heights in Northern Kurdistan to Arbil in northern Central Kudistan. The field design of hexagons is a traditional element employed by the Herki, and features the "Hakkari-Shanbo *gul*" within the hexagons. There is offset knotting in the field (but not in the border), a technique found in southern Central Kurdistan in Jaf weaving and northwards as far as the Hakkari area of Northern Kurdistan. This piece is similar in design style and construction to plates 26 and 27. As the Kurds have tended to move north over the past few centuries it is difficult to place this group precisely in one division of Kurdistan. This piece is one half of the original carpet, as the weavers created two halves meant to be joined into a single piece – often only one half of such rugs appears in the rug literature (see, for example, Erdmann, 1970, p. 106).



26

Hooked Diamond Medallions
Central or Northern Kurdistan
14th to 16th century
2′10″x 4′8″(86 x 184 cm)
incomplete, wool pile on a wool foundation

This strange and extraordinarily beautiful rug in the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin, formerly owned by Julius Lessing, is considered by many carpet enthusiasts to be one of the key rugs in carpet history. As its age has never been scientifically determined, authors have been free to propose a variety of dates and attributions. One first notices its very narrow central field and spectacular wide border. The field pattern is not unlike those of the so-called thirteenth-century rugs found in Konya in central Turkey. The border is composed of a single repeated motif that floats free against a dark blue background, and depicts a complex bird and tree design. The motifs point alternately inward and outward. This pattern was to become increasingly stylized over the following centuries, the birds gradually being replaced by palmettes, as can be seen in plate 25. In later examples the individual elements in the border are turned ninety degrees and the large white hooked "trees" join together to become palmettes. Both plate 25 and the Berlin rug have symmetric knotting on an all-wool foundation and offset knotting in the field but not in the border.



27

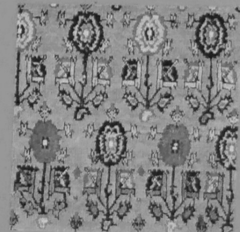
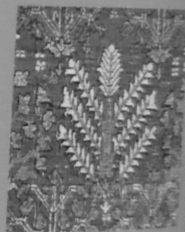

a b

Faces
Central or Northern Kurdistan
C-14 dated to 1042–1218
5′7″x 7′9″(170 x 235 cm)
incomplete, wool pile on a wool foundation

Over the past fifteen years seven early Anatolian carpets have been found in Tibet. All seven have been carbon-14 dated to the eleventh to fourteenth centuries. Five of them form a close group, and a number of opinions have been published as to their place of origin, ranging from eastern Anatolia to Persia and the Caucasus. The other two examples – of which this is the most complete – form a second group. This example is in the Kirchheim "Orient Stars" collection, Stuttgart; the other carpet section is in the George and Marie Hecksher Collection, San Francisco (4′0″x 2′5″/ 122 x 73 cm; see *Hali*, 109, March–April 2000, p. 36, fig. 1; C-14 to 1228–1391). Whereas the dating of these two clarifies that they are from the same period as the other five, their colors, weave, and pattern indicate that they were made in a different location and by different people. A comparison of the colors and design elements with later Kurdish rugs suggests that these might well be the earliest two surviving Kurdish rugs. For example, there is a relationship between this rug and plate 25. It has the typically Kurdish palette, in which blue, green, and light red predominate, various animals, and two human faces. It also has an all-wool foundation and offset knotting, noted above as characteristics of Central and Northern Kurdistan. During the thirteenth century the Ayyubid Kurds were dominant in Syria and Egypt, their empire extending to the north shore of Lake Van. They still ruled in Western Kurdistan in the fourteenth century. Both the iconography and the construction of this rug fit in with the religious beliefs and the weaving techniques of Yazdani Kurds, as we know from more recent rugs. Such Kurds were living and weaving in Central and Northern Kurdistan when this rug was made. The inner minor border of this rug (a) resembles the minor border in some later Kurdish and Caucasian rugs; see plate 80 (b).

Eastern Kurdistan



Lake Urmia
to Tabriz
Qasimlu
Miyan Do'ab
to Mosul
PERSIAN EMPIRE
Daryas
Sa'in Qala
Sa'uj Bulagh (Mahabad)
Sa'uj Bulagh
Hasanabad
to Tehran
Bukan
Mukrian
Takab
Zarrinkamar
Jafarabad
Saqqez
Sardasht
Lesser Zab
Bana
Garrus
Garrus (Bijar)
Gawurk
Khamsa
Sharbazar
Shahrbazar
ARDALAN PRINCIPALITY
Garrus
Suhravard
Sulaymania
Panchwin
Lake Zerivar
Barzanja
Marivan
Senna
Senna
Salawatabad
Khudabandalu
Gulanbar
Sharazur
Awraman
BABAN PRINCIPALITY
Halabja
Sirwan
Qorwa
Pawa
Sanjabi
Garmiyan
Jawanrud
Kamiyaran
Songor

above **Map of the main weaving areas of Eastern Kurdistan, circa 1835.**

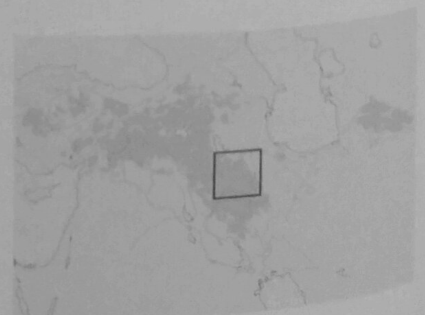


weaving area

area with Kurdish majority (approximate)

major commercial route

Perso-Ottoman line of claims



Eastern Kurdistan is a rugged and mountainous region; its generous rainfall allows for intensive agriculture. Most of the land was originally covered by forests, and the higher elevations are still wooded, although such areas continue to shrink. Centuries of felling have caused continuous soil erosion: farmland which was rich and productive when first cleared has long since lost its fertility. These depleted fields are almost always taken over by grasses, which then become rich pastures for the nomads' herds: what the farmers lost, the nomads gained. The area is bitterly cold and snowy in winter, requiring heavy rugs to shield the household; this was especially true for the nomads, who pitched their tents directly on the frigid ground. Summers, however, are often pleasant, although the temperature in the lowest elevations can reach 100°F (38°C).

Most of the clans and tribes encountered today in Eastern Kurdistan were in place by the turn of the nineteenth century, although at that time they were nomads while today they are almost all settled agriculturist or urban-dwellers. Their names, however, remain the same, as does the fealty their members feel toward one another. The great clans, from north to south (see map, pages 10–11), included the Bilbas, the Mamish, the Deh Bukri, the Mangur, the Gawurk, the Fayzullahbegi, the Mandumi, and the Galbaghi. Hundreds of smaller sub-clans were associated with these larger groupings.

Until 1867, Eastern Kurdistan was dominated by the historic Kurdish princely house of Ardalan, founded in the twelfth century, with its capital first at Shahrazur (Sulaymania) and later at Senna. In fact, since the sixteenth century most of the territory of Eastern Kurdistan was known as "Ardalan" and appeared as such on contemporary maps. Throughout their history the Ardalans had intermittent periods of independence interspersed with times when they served as suzerains to the Persian or Ottoman empires. The first sixty years of the eighteenth century were especially tumultuous for the Ardalans, as Nadir Shah forced them to pay high taxes and provide wheat for his army, the Babans (of Central Kurdistan) seized their territories on several occasions, and Karim Khan Zand invaded and burned Senna. Still, through their dominance of trade routes and commerce, the Ardalans became wealthy, especially in the late eighteenth century. For centuries they issued their own coinage; maintained an array of court historians, poets, and sages; commissioned impressive public works; and maintained a wealthy mercantile class which enriched itself and the Ardalans through trade in fibers, foodstuffs, and fabrics.

When the Qajars took the throne of Persia in 1794, the Ardalans gradually lost influence and control of important trade routes. The Ardalan principality had benefited from the riches of the southern trunk of the Silk Road, which ran through Kirmanshah, until 1802 when the Qajars took control of both Kirmanshah and the road. In 1820 they also lost control of the valuable northern spur of the Silk Road, running southwest of Lake Urmia. They forfeited their autonomy for the last time in exchange for suzerainty under the Qajar dynasty. The Ardalan aristocracy continued its traditional patronage of fine arts, including the finely woven Senna rugs and kilims which took their name from their capital city.

The Ardalans were a princely house: they were not a clan, nor were they nomadic. Although their domain contained a large

right **Kurdish soldiers of Afroman, serving as guards of the Ardalan palace at Senna, Eastern Kurdistan.**



number of nomadic tribes – including a tribe of Jafs and, in the south, the Kalhur, the Koliya'i, and the Shaykh Ismaeli – they relied on agriculture and commerce for their state income, and they maintained the peace and stability required for this commerce and agriculture. The death of the last Wali (ruler) of Ardalan in 1867 led to major disruptions in the administration of the Ardalan territory, since none of the Persian governors appointed after 1867 protected the settled communities as successfully as had the Ardalans. Without protection, these settled communities were easy prey for the nomads and their greedy, short-sighted khans. As a result, in the late nineteenth century many farmers reduced or completely abandoned their attempts to grow the agricultural commodities needed by the nomads, including the cotton needed for fine rug production.

Eastern Kurdistan has three major separate weaving areas: Senna, Garrus, and Sa'uj Bulagh. Their existence dates back several centuries. The weavings of Senna and Garrus were primarily produced in urban workshops. Sa'uj Bulagh was an urban center where fine carpets were made; it also served as a marketplace for weavings by the tribes of the surrounding area.

Senna

In 1530, Ottoman pressure caused the Ardalans to move their people from their capital of Shahrazur (Sulaymania) eastward to the fortress of Dhelam on the borders between the Ottoman and Persian spheres of influence. In the seventeenth century they made Senna, a mountain castle fortress, their capital.[27] The province of Ardalan was 200 miles (320 km) in length north to south, and 160 miles (250 km) in breadth. In the south it was divided from the plain of Hamadan by a small range of hills. Senna is just 60 miles (96 km) from Hamadan, and 77 miles (124 km) from Kirmanshah. The western boundary of Ardalan was 100 miles (160 km) beyond Senna. In 1810, when John MacDonald Kinneir visited Senna, there were eight thousand inhabitants, of which two thousand were Jews, Armenians, or Nestorian Christians.[28] As early as the seventeenth century, Jean Baptiste Tavernier, a French traveler to Persia, remarked on the fine rugs woven in Senna.[29] Sir John Malcolm, British ambassador to Persia, visited Senna in 1810 and wrote: "Persia is famous for its carpets but none I have ever seen surpassed in beauty that on which the Wali and his guests were seated in this great hall."[30] According to Claudius J. Rich, who stayed in Senna as a guest of the Ardalans in 1820, the Wali had a beautiful garden, and a court similar to that of the Shah of Persia. Rich praised the beautiful carpets "of superior quality" being woven there.[31]

Throughout the nineteenth century fine carpets and textiles continued to be woven in Senna for the aristocracy and the rich of Persia; they were also exported to Europe and North America. In the nineteenth century the Senna designers generally employed a Persian-inspired curvilinear motif which emulated Safavid medallion book cover designs and the popular nineteenth-century *boteh* designs, or they used the traditional Kurdish *masi awita* and *mina khani* designs. These weavings have a thin foundation with close-clipped symmetrical knots. The backs of these rugs feel "scratchy" to the touch, which is an identifiable characteristic. Starting in at least the early nineteenth century, perhaps earlier, and continuing throughout the twentieth century, they were single-wefted with a cotton (sometimes silk) weft and warp. We know from the travelers' reports mentioned above that beautiful carpets were woven in

Senna in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it is not certain whether they had the same construction: I have never seen a Senna from that earlier era which is constructed like those from the early nineteenth century and later, with close-clipped knots and a sandpaper-scratchy-feeling back.

There is a small group of weavings known to the carpet world which have the coloration of Senna and the look of Senna, but have a soft wool medium-cut pile, no "scratchy" back, and a handle and feel that is different from Senna; they date to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (I have not seen any that I would date later than the first quarter of the nineteenth century). Only three known field designs feature in this group: an overall field of flowers (as in plate 28), a field design of flower blossoms and large leaves (as in plate 29), and a small patterned field design (as in a rug depicted in an advertisement in *Hali* in 1992).[32] The major and minor borders of the three types have the same designs. The rugs are symmetrically knotted. The group employs vibrant, saturated colors in many sumptuous shades, and the wool quality is of the highest. The designs of this group are also found in nineteenth-century Senna kilims (for example, plate 30). Plate 29, the rug in *Hali*, and the kilim shown in plate 30 all have similar designs, colors, and motifs above their *mihrabs* (prayer niches). Lefevre and Partners, London rug auctioneers, illustrated a piled example of one of these prayer design pieces in 1976.[33] The Lefevre rug has the small multiple flower field design of our plate 28, with the design above the *mihrab* of our plates 29 and 30 and the "arrow-head" *mihrab* arch seen in the latter. The borders are similar to all these pieces. Lefevre could not specifically identify the origin of his rug but believed the style and coloration resembled Senna work, and compared its design to a known Senna kilim. Battilossi of Turin, Italy, advertised another of these interesting pieces in *Hali* magazine in 1992.[34] This example has a field design of flower blossoms and large leaves similar to our plate 29, and the usual borders.

This small group has been misnamed "Joshagan" by the carpet trade because the design of their main border with small white flowers and stems resembled the borders of "vase"-type rugs which Islamic historian Arthur Upham Pope mistakenly believed were made in Joshagan.[35] Whatever area this group of rugs came from it definitely was not Joshagan. According to A. Cecil Edwards, Joshagan weavers used the asymmetrical or Persian knot, their weavings were double-wefted with cotton warps and wefts, and for the past two hundred years they have employed only two "closely allied" patterns of designs, neither of which resembles the designs of the subject group.[36]

There was and is a powerful Senna-based family called Wakilis, who for centuries lived on the opposite side of the river from the Ardalan family. The Wakilis opposed the Ardalans and occasionally assisted their adversaries.[37] In his book *The Persian Carpet*, A. Cecil Edwards illustrates a late nineteenth-century rug from Senna with a field design similar to the design above the *mihrab* of these older pieces, and calls it the "Vikilli" design.[38] Could the Wakilis have made these rugs in some unidentified school of production established to rival the Ardalans? Did the Senna weavers change the construction of their rugs after the first quarter of the nineteenth century, or is it more likely that these mystery rugs are survivors of a special workshop in Senna which produced them for important customers?



right **Kurdish man of Sa'uj Bulagh, Eastern Kurdistan, in 1890.**

Garrus

Located in the foothills approaching the flatlands of Persia, Garrus has been a significant Kurdish city since antiquity, when it was the capital of Media Minor. Important writers, scientists, and politicians from Garrus contributed to the Safavid dynasty, and it was a major commercial center. Garrus was more populous than Senna in the nineteenth century. As it was in the west of Persia, it was fortunate to escape the ravages of the Afghans and to a certain extent the economic incompetence of Nadir Shah. In the eighteenth century it benefited from the lack of a centralized Persian government bent on collecting high taxes, and from the benign, decentralized rule of the Zands.

The brilliant weaving school of Garrus, like that of Senna, did not develop in a vacuum in a process of *deus ex machina* as Edwards proposed, but rather was the product of centuries of skill and tradition. Garrus weaving benefited from the area's stability over the centuries, which meant that there was enough time for the art to develop and become refined. Moreover, this was a rich province whose economy could support its products, and which was located sufficiently close to the major commercial arteries of western Asia to benefit from international commerce. It was not far from Tabriz and its markets. In 1880 European and Tabriz merchants developed workshops in Garrus for weaving the famed carpets that are called "Bijar" today. These weavings have been treasured and preserved down the years by rug collectors. The rich colors applied by Garrus dyers to the lustrous hard wool in multi-flowered patterns are considered by many to be the most attractive of Kurdish urban weavings: I have seen private rug collections made up entirely of these pieces.

Garrus was virtually destroyed during World War I, and was abandoned when disease was prevalent. Many of the surviving inhabitants relocated to Bijar, 10 miles (16 km) away. Because of the perception that "plague" lingered within Garrus, it remained deserted. By the time Edwards was writing, the carpets made famous by the weavers of Garrus in earlier centuries had been woven for thirty years in the growing town of Bijar. Before the twentieth century Garrus rugs – extolled by carpet merchants as the "iron rugs" of Persia because of their heavy, durable, tightly packed construction – generally had wool warps (Z3S) and two thick wool wefts in addition to one thin wool weft between each row of knots. In the commercial carpets of the twentieth century, cotton was often used for warps.

Sa'uj Bulagh

Sa'uj Bulagh was and is a district as well as a city 25 miles (40 km) northwest of Garrus. Its name means "cold spring" in Mongolian, a reminder of the Central Asian origin of the Ilkhanid Persian rulers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The city's name was changed to Mahabad ("City of the Medes") in 1935. Since the days of the Medes it has been an important commercial center. Its exposed location in the foothills, however, left it open to invasion.

Fine carpets, including versions of "garden" carpets (see plates 40, 41, 46, 48, 50), were woven in Sa'uj Bulagh and/or its environs. Sa'uj Bulagh workshop rugs woven in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were generally constructed on cotton warps and wool wefts. Tribal rugs from the surrounding mountainous areas usually had an all-wool foundation. In the nineteenth century, due to a variety of adverse factors, wool became

right **Kurdish khan and tribal group, north of Sa'uj Bulagh, photographed by the Rev. Paul Gray in 1891.**



the principal medium for the foundation of the urban weavings as well. Smaller scale tribal rugs with lustrous wool and coloration were woven throughout the centuries by the nomadic clans of the Sa'uj Bulagh area, for their own use as well as a cash commodity. Often, the tribal khans would obtain them from their subjects as a form of taxation.

The city of Sa'uj Bulagh was the marketplace for the district and, until the middle of the nineteenth century, the seat of the Mukri (Mokri) emirs. Like the Ardalans, the Sorans, and the Babans, the Mukri were a princely Kurdish family, not a tribal group. The city once had a sizable Jewish and Armenian population, which dated from antiquity; their commercial traditions helped build a European export market for a variety of goods, including the luxurious garden carpets. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century the Mukri were constantly at war with the Ardalans, resulting in the death of many Mukri. When J. Baillie Fraser visited Sa'uj Bulagh in the 1830s he reported that the "plague" had killed half of the Mukri and that their emir, having lost his warriors and power, was being forced to pay an annual tax of 25,000 tomans to the Shah of Persia. A few years earlier the tax had been just 1,000 tomans a year. Fraser remarked that this tax was reducing the Mukri to poverty and was robbing all of them of their freedom.[39]

In the nineteenth century, the story throughout Kurdistan was one of repeated epidemics, internecine warfare, loss of commerce, and heavy taxation, sapping the Kurds' energy and productivity. Their rugs give visual evidence of increasing poverty coupled with a loss of strength and independence. It could be coincidental, but large-scale garden carpets stopped being produced in the latter part of the nineteenth century when the Mukri family ceased ruling in Sa'uj Bulagh. Cotton, which had been grown or imported for rug foundations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was minimally used in the nineteenth century. The sheep of Sa'uj Bulagh, however, were still famed for their fine lustrous wool, and small exquisite tribal carpets were produced throughout the nineteenth century by the nomadic tribes surrounding Sa'uj Bulagh.

It is my belief that the famed garden carpets attributed in rug literature to "Northwest Persia" were created by Kurdish weavers in Sa'uj Bulagh in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and probably even earlier. The construction and coloration of these garden carpets is similar to known, smaller contemporaneous woven Sa'uj Bulagh examples (compare plate 40 and plate 41), and their borders resemble other known Sa'uj Bulagh productions, as the plates herein reflect.[40] Travelers to Sa'uj Bulagh commented on the inhabitants' love of fine gardens.[41] A prosperous urban center was presumably required for the production and distribution of these large, expensive carpets, and Sa'uj Bulagh is the likeliest rug-producing urban center in northwest Persia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rugs woven in Tabriz and Urmia in that era had a different construction and different color combinations.

The Bilbas confederacy in the eighteenth century was a strong group of tribal entities around Sa'uj Bulagh which included the Mangur, the Mamish, and the Piran. Their weavings were probably marketed at Sa'uj Bulagh. It is interesting that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the ancient Kurdish city of Daryas, 10 miles (16 km) north of Sa'uj Bulagh on the road to



right **Kurdish khan (see page 111) and his children, north of Sa'uj Bulagh.**

Urmia, was larger than Sa'uj Bulagh and was reputedly a center for weaving until it ceased to exist in the eighteenth century. The old pieces attributed to Sa'uj Bulagh might just as well be called "Sa'uj Bulagh/Daryas" as the two cities were one in spirit.

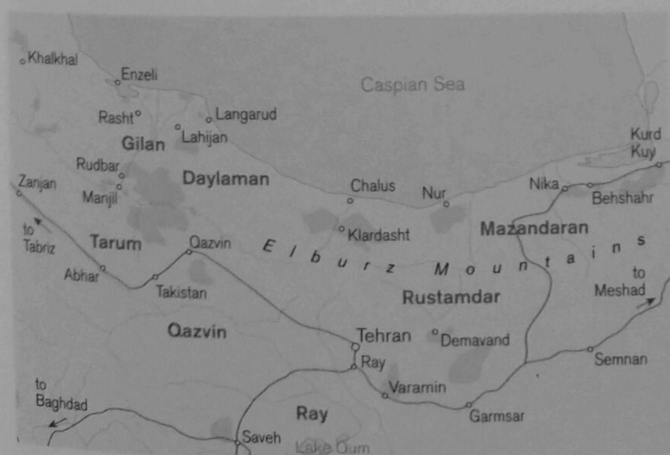
Six Kurdish clans have lived and are presently living around the city of Sa'uj Bulagh: the Fayzullahbegi, the Deh Bukri, a branch of the Jaf, the Mamish, the Mangur, and the Zarza. It is logical that the best of the tribal Sa'uj Bulagh pieces were woven by the Fayzullahbegi and Deh Bukri tribes, as they were the most prosperous and had the finest sheep. Remnants of the Mukri reputedly joined the Deh Bukri tribe, which lived east of Sa'uj Bulagh in the late nineteenth century. The tribal rugs – small in scale, long in pile, heavy in handle, and highly suitable for use in tents – were generally woven with traditional Kurdish designs rather than the patterns of the urban carpets. They frequently have two minor hooked borders, referred to in rug literature as the "running dog" or wave design. I believe these hooked borders were meant to depict the mountains that surrounded the lush highland meadows in this area, which the weavers also replicated in the field of their work with woven flowers. These tribal pieces usually have all-wool construction, red-dyed wefts, and a corrosive brown ground color. More research is needed to delineate the weavings of these influential clans that lived in the mountainous areas surrounding Sa'uj Bulagh.

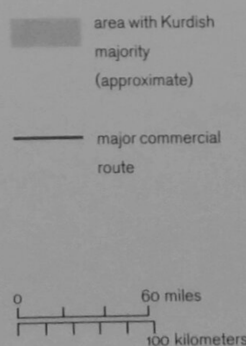
Elburz Mountains and environs

There are pockets of Kurds in various corners of the Iranian plateau,[42] and particularly in the Elburz Mountains (see map, below). Some were nomadic from ancient times, emigrating from their heartland in search of new grass or water. In the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, under the Safavid and Afsharid dynasties of Persia, these small Kurdish communities outside of Kurdistan came to be augmented by hundreds of thousands of deported and relocated Kurds. The district of Varamin, southeast of Tehran, served as a "collection center" for the deportee Kurds. Thousands of them spent time at Varamin before being sent off to their final destinations in various corners of the Safavid empire. Many, however, ended up staying in Varamin or the foothills of the Elburz Mountains. These Kurds were representatives of many different clans and thus wove different styles of fabrics and rugs. The Pazuki/Paziki, brought from the Urmia (North Kurdistan) region during the Safavid period, is presently the most prominent Kurdish clan in the Varamin district; it is followed by the Ossanlu, brought from Zanjan in the 1790s, whose territory extends to Garmsar in the east.

To the west of Varamin in the areas of Qazvin, Zanjan, Khalkhal, and Ardebil there are pockets of Kurds. The Kurdish confederacy of Siyah-Mansuri, considered one of the primary Kurdish tribes of Persia at the beginning of the seventeenth century, still is the dominant clan in the fertile plains between the Qazvin and the Zanjan area. They are members of the Ahl-i-Haqq branch of the Yarsani religion; however, very few of them now speak Kurdish or identify themselves as Kurds.

Nearly all the Kurdish clans and farmers in this area engage in weaving. The weavings produced by these various groups and brought to the Varamin area are all labeled Varamin, the market city, as are weavings produced by displaced Lors and other nomadic groups. Research is necessary to identify the actual clan responsible for any individual piece in this area.





left **Map of the Elburz Mountains and environs, circa 1835.**





a



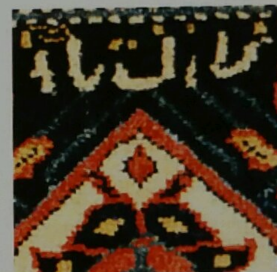
b

28

Rows of Flowers
Senna, Eastern Kurdistan
18th century
6′5″x 10′0″ (196 x 305 cm)
reduced, wool pile on a wool foundation

The composition of offset rows of flowers without a lattice is not uncommon. This example, however, is special because the flowers are well scaled in relation to the full pattern and are beautifully colored. The field is flanked by a dark blue border and red-ground minor borders. A beautifully executed floral repeat is particularly associated with rugs from Eastern Kurdistan, and this is the earliest Senna weaving illustrated here. However, although it is typically Senna in color and has a border pattern (a) similar to that of plate 29 (b), it differs in handle and construction from the majority of pile rugs attributed to Senna. It has an all-wool foundation, and is single-wefted for part of its length and double-wefted for the rest. It also has fine, soft wool and lacks the rough, "scratchy" back typical of Senna piled rugs.



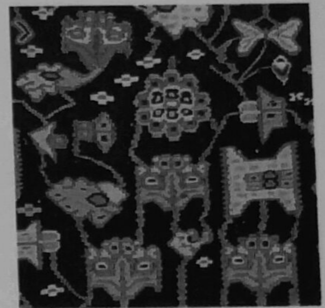

a

29

Wedding Rug
Senna, Eastern Kurdistan
early 19th century
3′9″x 4′1″(114 x 125 cm)
wool pile on a cotton foundation

Rugs with white backgrounds, regardless of origin, are traditionally associated with bridal dowry weavings. The fact that this rug, with its prayer arch (*mihrab*) design, has the word *mubarakh* (a) ("good luck") repeated three times across the top of the blue spandrel reinforces this association. In the field is a variation of the *masi awita* ("fish around a lotus") pattern also seen on plate 31. The design above the *mihrab* is similar to that on the "prayer" kilim illustrated in plate 30. It has an all-cotton foundation and is single-wefted. Like later nineteenth-century Senna pile rugs, this example is finely knotted, with more than 270 knots per square inch. The pile, however, is velvety and extremely soft, and the rug has a flat, leathery back, in contrast to the "scratchy" handle of later Senna rugs.





a

Shawl Design
Senna, Eastern Kurdistan
early 19th century
4′3″ x 5′4″ (130 x 163 cm)
kilim, tapestry weave
in wool

The yellow and white stripes in the field of this fine Senna "prayer" design kilim indicate that it may have been made for the bride and groom to kneel on at their wedding. This design is derived from shawls and other late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Persian fabrics. Such designs were also extremely popular during the reign of Fath Ali Shah (1794–1834) and are found on clothing, textiles and rugs made at that time. The designs above the arch (a), similar to those in plate 29, are recognized as part of the Senna iconography, which assists in identifying these two pieces as Senna work. The "barber's pole" outer minor border and the narrow guard stripes are typical of this group. Senna kilims are probably the most finely worked examples of the slit-tapestry technique found on rugs of the east.




a

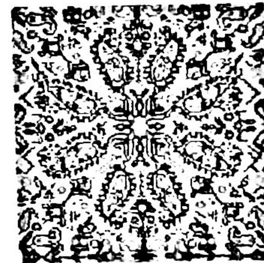
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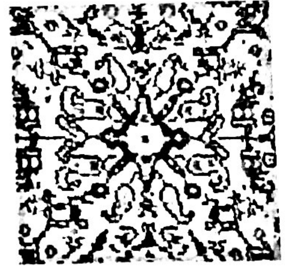
Fish Surrounding Lotuses
Senna, Eastern Kurdistan
late 19th century
5′2″ x 8′3″ (158 x 252 cm)
wool pile on a cotton foundation

The field design on this rug is called by the Kurds *masi awita* ("fish composite" or "fish around a lotus") (a). "*Masi*" is the Kurdish word for the Farsi "*mahi*" (where the Persians use an "h" the Kurds use an "s"), meaning fish. The fish swimming around a lotus flower represents the "yin" and "yang," a concept brought to Kurdistan by the Mongols in the thirteenth century. Western carpet literature refers to this design as the "Herati" pattern. The main border of this rug is filled with large rosettes in different colors; the upper and lower borders abruptly cut off the side borders. This rug has the usual all-cotton foundation, is single-wefted, and has both the firm handle and the "scratchy," "sandpaper" back associated with nineteenth-century Senna pile rugs.



32


a


b

Botehs
Senna, Eastern Kurdistan
late 19th century
4'5"x 6'9" (135 x 206 cm)
wool pile on a silk foundation

The design consists of eight *boteh* leaves arranged in a Maltese cross pattern called *boteh hasht zelli* ("eight *boteh* pattern") (a), alternating with smaller *botehs* arranged in circles (b); the ground is a rich gold-yellow. This rug is an example of the luxurious commercial weavings produced in Senna workshops after 1850 for wealthy Persian clients as well as for export; such rugs are the antithesis of tribal weavings produced elsewhere in Kurdistan. It is finely knotted and, like many of the highest-quality Senna rugs from the nineteenth century, has an all-silk foundation.



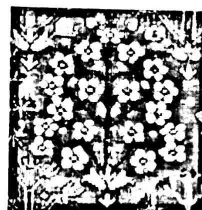
33

Arabesque
Senna or Garrus,
Eastern Kurdistan
mid-19th century
4'10"x 5'9"(147 x 175 cm)
wool pile on silk warps
and cotton wefts

A fine Kurdish workshop rug with "split-palmette" and trefoil arabesque patterns; this design is found on sixteenth-century Timurid-inspired faience mosaics in the Jami Mosque in Isfahan, and both it and the border pattern can be related to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Safavid carpets. This example has a structure usually associated with nineteenth-century Senna workshop weavings, with silk warps, cotton wefts, and one weft shoot between each row of knots. Although related by color to Garrus weaving, silk-warped Garrus rugs are usually triple-wefted. This workshop creation was made to order and could have been woven in Senna or in Garrus.



34



a

Trees and Flowering Shrubs with Medallion
Garrus, Eastern Kurdistan
18th century
6′2″x14′0″(188 x 427 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

This eighteenth-century Garrus carpet has a flowering shrub (a) and medallion design. With sections of the central medallion in each corner, its field follows the same classical carpet layout as a mid-seventeenth-century tree and medallion rug in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (published in McMullan, 1965, pl. 17). The borders of this rug are Kurdish inspired, whereas the borders of the McMullan rug are typically Kerman. The similarity between the triple-wefted construction of Garrus work and the construction of some of the so-called "vase" carpets of Kerman has been noted by rug historians. The structure of the knot, whether symmetric or asymmetric, assists in determining whether a particular weaving is Kurdish or Persian. Other Garrus weavings illustrated here, such as the *soumak* in plate 38 and the large nineteenth-century carpet in plate 35, have similar designs and palettes. Further objective research by scholars is needed to explore the design origins of these carpets. We know that Garrus is an ancient city and that Kurds have been weaving there since time immemorial. Does this rug design predate the Safavid "vase" carpets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?



35

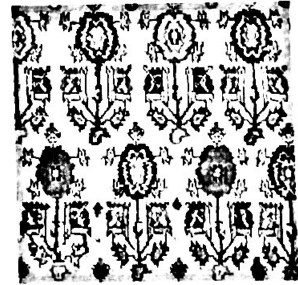

a


b

Trees in Medallion with Pendants
Garrus, Eastern Kurdistan
second half of the 19th century
8'9" x 16'10" (267 x 513 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

This carpet has a typical Garrus design consisting of a large red-ground central medallion with pendant ends on a solid ground, in this case dark blue, with contrasting yellow corner pieces which then continue down the length of the field on each side. The effect is spectacular. The pattern can also be viewed as a yellow ground carpet with beautiful flowers and stems, over which is laid a hexagonal medallion in dark blue, on top of which is the red-ground medallion. In both construction and palette, it is similar to the rug illustrated in plate 34. Both the palette and the treatment of the floral elements (a, b) – bold green leaves and shades of yellow, red, and mauve – are found consistently on Garrus weavings from different periods.



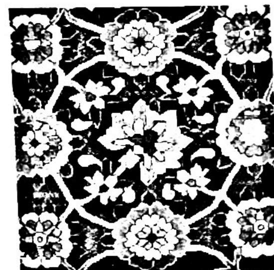

a

36

Rows of Flowers
Garrus, Eastern Kurdistan
circa 1800
4'4"x 8'2"(132 x 249 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The field is composed of offset rows of ascending flowers against a green background. This version of the design resembles that on the rug illustrated in plate 28 (a), which I have attributed to Senna. The present piece, however, has the same typically heavy all-wool construction as the Garrus carpets illustrated in plates 34 and 35, with partly buried thin wefts between pairs of thick ones. Construction and color are more reliable guides to attribution than design. This type of rug has been called "Joshagan" in the past although in design, wool quality, and structure this example is clearly Kurdish work.





a

37

Mina Khani with Medallion
Garrus, Eastern Kurdistan
mid-19th century
4′7″x 9′3″(140 x 282 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

This rug has the aster lattice *mina khani* design with central medallion first encountered on the rug in plate 1 (a), to which it bears resemblance, although here the medallion is dark blue and the field is ivory colored. The shape of the central medallion is one particularly associated with Garrus, an attribution confirmed by its heavy all-wool foundation as found in plates 35 and 36. The field is enclosed by a primary border of a meandering stem with flowers, and this is flanked by floral guard borders.



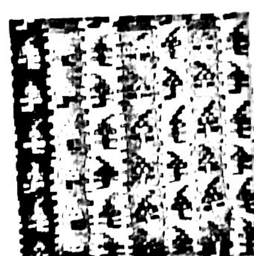

a


b

Fish Surrounding Lotuses with Star Medallion
Garrus, Eastern Kurdistan
18th century
4′6″ x 8′10″ (137 x 269 cm)
soumak, flatweave in wool

Flatwoven rugs in the *soumak* (weft-wrapping) technique from Garrus are extremely rare. This is the largest example known to the author. It has another version of the *masi awita* pattern seen on the rug in plate 31 (a). The fish swimming around the lotus in this piece (b) are part of a sophisticated trellis pattern. On many old Kurdish weavings, the "fish" are depicted with eyes; on most later rugs, however, the weavers were unaware of the design's original meaning and "changed" the fish into what appear to be leaves. Superimposed on the lattice are the medallion and corners typical of Garrus pile carpets. Many of the known *soumaks* attributed to Garrus have the oak-leaf and flower pattern seen in the main border of this example, which argues for a common workshop provenance. The pattern also appears in many nineteenth-century Garrus pile carpets, including plate 35. This *soumak* has both ground and pattern wefts, and its fine strong wool is similar to that used in Garrus pile rugs. A study of known Garrus *soumak* rugs has been made by John Wertime (1992).





a



b

39

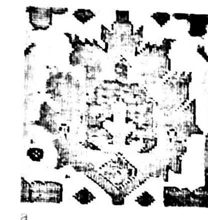
Shawl Design

Garrus, Eastern Kurdistan
mid-19th century
4'5" x 5'1" (135 x 155 cm)
kilim, tapestry weave in wool with small pieces of silver

The design of narrow stripes with flowers and a prayer design format is discussed in the caption to the Senna kilim illustrated in plate 30. However, the "drawing" of the field ( ) and borders of this piece is more angular and stylized than that on the Senna piece ( ), hence its attribution to Garrus. In rug literature these kilims have been attributed to both Senna and Garrus. The rug has a small amount of silver brocading in random places, a feature sometimes interpreted as a good luck talisman and thus suggesting it was woven for a wedding. Silver would be unacceptable in a weaving made for prayer as it is scratchy as well as ostentatious, but it would be suitable for a bride and groom to kneel on during the marriage ceremony.



40


a

overleaf detail of plate 40

Flower and Leaf Lattice
Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
17th century
4'3"x 7'4" (130 x 224 cm)
wool pile on cotton warps
and wool wefts

This offset pattern is composed of palmettes and stems with large forked leaves set against an ivory background. One has the impression that it is only part of a much larger scheme. Very similar palmettes, drawn in a curvilinear manner and combined with identical forked leaves, can be seen on a few examples of workshop carpets made from the late seventeenth century onward in Herat, in Khurasan province, east Persia (see Pope, 1938–39, pl. 1272A, dated 1223 AH, c. AD 1808). A rather debased version of the same pattern was used in the Caucasus in the eighteenth century, and known there as the Harshang design (see Yetkin, 1978, vol. 1, pls 84–93). There is little doubt that this carpet is from the same cartoon as the Khurasan examples, but the origins of this design – whether the workshops of Herat, the Kurds, or elsewhere – are unknown. I consider this rug to be a late seventeenth-century weaving from the Sa'uj Bulagh area, based on its handle, design, colors, and construction, and the fact that it is much older than the few later examples of its type that I have examined. The "running dog" minor borders, which I interpret as a schematic rendering of a mountain range (see plates 45, 49), are typical of Sa'uj Bulagh. The wool quality, the very old appearance of the back of the piece, the palette, and the structure (cotton warps, wool wefts with two shoots between each row and a similar density of symmetric knots) can also be related to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century "garden" carpets (see plate 41). The distinctive apricot shade (a) used in both here and in plate 41 is one I have not seen in nineteenth-century Sa'uj Bulagh rugs nor in weavings from other areas: thus it may have been used exclusively in pre-nineteenth-century weavings from this area. Another Sa'uj Bulagh rug, published initially by Jon Thompson (Barbican Art Gallery, 1983, p. 46), portrays this apricot color.





a



b

41

Garden Carpet Fragment
Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
17th century
6'9"x 7'10"(206 x 239 cm)
section, wool pile on cotton warps and wool wefts

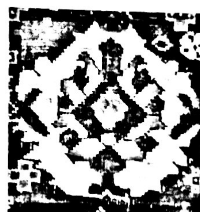
This striking piece in the Barbara Sedlin Collection, New York, is only a very small section of what was once a large "garden" carpet. Several complete "garden" carpets exist, ranging in date from the seventeenth through to the mid-nineteenth century. The largest extant carpet with this design scheme (divided by canals into squares in the manner of a classical Persian garden), in the al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait, is 11'8"wide and 31'2"long (357 x 952 cm), but was originally even longer (see Pope, 1938–39, pl. 1270). The land is in dark blue and the canals are in brown with curves of ivory; some examples include fish in the water. At the left-hand side of the Sedlin section we can see the edge of the central canal, which is generally wider than the two main avenues of cypresses and birds that flank it. At the center of the original carpet was probably a large square pond. Gardens have long been a passion in the Middle East. Artists have historically attempted to "catch and hold the evanescent charms of the garden ... in springtime to compensate for the cold rains of winter" (Pope, 1931, p. 126). The famed seventh-century AD carpet that decorated the banquet hall of the Palace of Ctesephon in the time of the Sasanian emperor Chosroes II represented a garden with ponds, flowers, birds, bees, and quadrupeds worked in precious materials and studded with gems (Pope, 1931, p. 131). Most carpet scholars suggest that the earliest extant "garden" carpets were woven in Persia – a comprehensive listing is given by Charles Grant Ellis (1982). Three Kerman examples, the Amber Palace garden carpet (Central Museum, Jaipur), the Wagner carpet (Burrell Collection, Glasgow), and the Figdor carpet in Vienna (Museum of Decorative Art), can firmly be attributed to the seventeenth century. This section has a similar palette, structure, and handle to the Sa'uj Bulagh rug in plate 40. The large lilies in the field of that example (a) can also be seen in a border here (b).



42

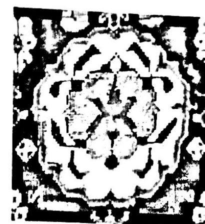
Trees and Palmettes
Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
18th century
6'4"x 12'11"(193 x 394 cm)
wool pile on a wool
foundation

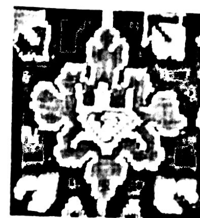
A beautiful Sa'uj Bulagh carpet, one of a number of urban-produced Eastern Kurdistan weavings that can be presumed to be based on sixteenth- to seventeenth-century Safavid carpets of several different design groups. The rug illustrated here is a later example of the "vase" design carpets, so called because several of them have large and ornate vases depicted among the huge, stylized, and brilliantly colored palmettes. These palmettes are among the most striking design elements in the field (a). The main border, too, with palmettes alternating with blooming sprays of flowers, is found in very similar form on early vase carpets. This may be one of the types of carpet woven commercially in Eastern Kurdistan in the eighteenth century which were made to fill the void created by the decline of carpet production throughout Persia in that century, as discussed above (see Introduction). This rug has red wefts, and a corrosive brown dye has been used on the pile in the field. Both of these are characteristic features of Sa'uj Bulagh weavings.


a



43


a


b

Afshan
Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
18th century
6'6"x16'9"(198 x 511 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

According to the late Charles Grant Ellis in his famous catalogue, *Early Caucasian Rugs* (The Textile Museum, 1975, p. 19), it was the Azerbaijani artist and writer Lyatif Kerimov who named this pattern the *afshan*, a term by which it is now universally known in rug literature. The two principal elements are stylized round rosettes (a) and diagonally placed palmettes (b). The former are arranged in horizontal rows and surrounded by a plethora of floral forms in varying degrees of abstraction. Many *afshan* carpets, most usually on a blue ground, have survived. The majority of carpets with this design are believed to have been made in workshops in the Karabagh region, and the design was clearly popular enough to have been copied by the Kurds. The Karabagh carpets are very firm, with one of the wefts pulled tight and a heavier weft inserted every 4 inches or so (reportedly to mark the end of a day's work). The *afshan* pattern was also used in Shirvan in the eastern Caucasus, but with a very different color scheme, and on carpets that are quite fine and thin. In this example both the reciprocal trefoil border and the minor border pattern are similar to those on a "garden" carpet in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow, illustrated by Gigi Pagnano (1983, pl. 116). The reciprocal trefoil border replicates the design of bricks and wood edging which gardeners in Eastern Kurdistan use even today to mark out the borders of their flower gardens. The same soft, glossy wool as that found in later Sa'uj Bulagh weavings has been used, and if one compares the more abstract rendering of the flower blossoms in plate 48, one can see how such motifs change over time.



44

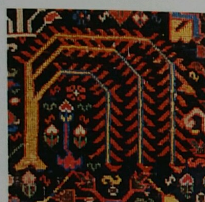
Bid Majnum
Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
17th century
1'10"x 7'8" (56 x 234 cm)
section, wool pile on a
wool foundation

This field section of what was probably a large carpet from Sa'uj Bulagh has the design called *bid majnum* ("weeping willow"), a popular design employed by the Kurds. Four different types of trees – cypress, willow, cherry, and plane – can be depicted in these carpets, and the pattern is found on other west Persian carpets from the seventeenth century to the present day. A complete red-ground example from this era is in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow (see Pagnano, 1983, pl. 111), and a later, blue-ground example is illustrated by Rosa Holt (1937, pl. 54). A third resides in the Kestner Museum, Hanover (see Landesmuseum, 1987, pl. 43). The field of this carpet was cut into several sections, which are now scattered among various private collections.




b


c

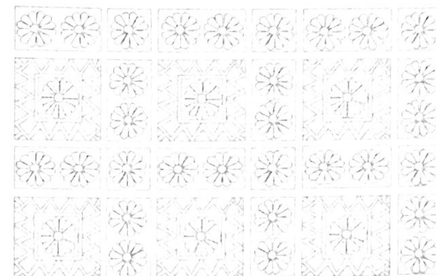

a

45

Bid Majnum on Blue Field
Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
18th century
7'6" x 17'0" (229 x 518 cm)
wool pile on cotton warps
and wool wefts

In addition to the weeping willow itself (a), there are two principal types of trees in this version of the *bid majnum* pattern: the plane tree with branches and tripartite leaves (b), and the cherry with white flowers in bloom (c). The plane and the cherry are often found in the field and borders of Sa'uj Bulagh rugs. The inner guard has the mountain peak pattern seen on other Sa'uj Bulagh rugs in this collection (for example, in plates 40 and 49). This rug has many diverse colored floral figures on a dark blue ground, cotton warps, red dyed wool wefts, and two weft shoots between each row of knots.





above Illustration of stone threshold with design of rosettes in a lattice. Found in the Assyrian capital of Kahlu (Tell Nimrud), on the left bank of the Tigris west of Arbil, dated 721–705 BC.

46

"Crossroads" Design with Plants
Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
circa 1800
5'9"x 8'6"(175 x 259 cm)
wool pile on a cotton foundation

The design seen here is a version of the "garden" pattern known as the *chwarsuch* ("crossroads"). It consists of an overall rectangular grid with a flowering plant in each compartment and with an almost abstract red "vine meander" in the grid itself, a pattern repeated in the inner and outer guard borders. The design is generally considered derivative from an Assyrian stone floor "rug" (see illustration above), which is thought to be a design taken from woven carpets. A number of closely related rugs have survived, of which the best known is in the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin (see *Hali*, 70, 1993, front cover). Like the rug illustrated here, the Berlin example has two types of plants alternating in each horizontal row and a similar "vine meander" in the grid and border guards, but it has individual freestanding shrubs repeated in its green-ground border. All known rugs of this design group have an all-cotton foundation, a dry, almost flat back, and a thin, leathery handle.




a

47

Flaming Palmettes and Cypresses
Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
18th century
5'9" x 11'0" (175 x 335 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

This rug from Sa'uj Bulagh has a version of the so-called "flaming palmette" motif, which actually represents the blossoms of a central tree. Also present are small stylized cypress trees (*serv*) (a), which grow wild in the Zagros Mountains.

The cypress has an important place in Middle Eastern iconography. It was much admired for its elegant simplicity: it stayed green all year round but bore neither flowers nor fruit, nor did it "boast" of its sleek height but rather, as depicted by Kurdish and Persian weavers, drooped its head in modesty. Its lack of flowers and fruit gave it a religious significance as a symbol of freedom from earthly needs, and it was traditionally planted in graveyards. In Persian secular iconography it is often depicted entwined with a plane tree and was thus used as a symbol of the male embraced by the female. A few examples of this type of carpet woven in the nineteenth century have appeared at auction (Christie's East, New York, 22 January 1991, lot 60; Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 18 November 2000, lot 76). This carpet has a corroded brown field with wefts dyed red, the *sine qua non* of Sa'uj Bulagh weaving.



48



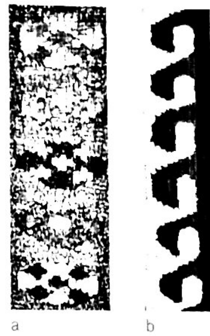
a

Blossoming Trees
Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
early 19th century
4'1" x 6'11" (124 x 211 cm)
wool pile on a wool
foundation

The arrangement of highly schematized flowers in vertical rows is similar to that seen on the rug in plate 47. In discussing a third rug with a very similar field design, Alberto Levi (1993, pp. 92–3, fig. 15) suggested that this greatly simplified design was originally derived from a "garden" carpet, and that the "tuning fork" motif (a) (arranged in three vertical rows in the field both on the rug discussed by Levi and on the present piece) is all that is left of the more realistic depictions of water courses seen on earlier carpets. This design, however, appears in the field of an earlier carpet (plate 45), where it clearly represents the lower part of a tree in blossom. Like the rug illustrated in plate 47, the field of the present rug has been piled in wool dyed with a corrosive brown; as on other rugs from the same area, it has red wefts, very soft, fine wool, and a rich, glowing palette.



49


a b

Ashlik
Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
second half of the
19th century
4'4" x 7'4" (133 x 215 cm)
wool pile on a wool
foundation

The repeated serrated-edged diamond in the field of this rug is called *ashlik* and is found on the weavings of many different tribal groups. It is particularly associated with rugs from Eastern Kurdistan. Interestingly, this rug has the outer "rosette and bar" guard (a) usually considered a Jaf Kurd "signature" (see plates 12–15), although the inner mountain peak guard (b) is typical in both style and color of other Sa'uj Bulagh rugs (see plate 45). It has red wefts and a corrosive brown field. A remarkable feature of this rug is its brilliant and diverse palette containing fifteen colors. Tribal weavings tend to have a maximum palette of seven or eight colors.



50

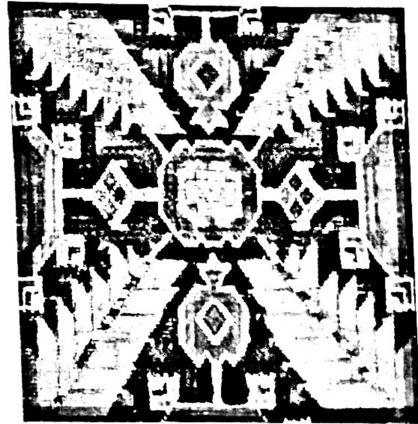

a


b

Garden Carpet
North of Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
early 19th century
2'9"x 8'7" (84 x 262 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The narrow central field has a repeating design of small ascending flowers (a) against an ivory ground. This is enclosed by a wide border of rosettes alternating with large inward- and outward-pointing shrubs (b). The border is flanked by a narrow guard stripe in red. In terms of both color and "drawing," this is clearly a tribal weaving. Its long narrow format and certain elements of its design, in particular the branched shrubs alternating with rosettes in the border, suggest that this is a simplified version of the large Kurdish "garden" carpets woven in urban workshops. An example of the latter type, formerly in the McMullan Collection and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (see McMullan, 1965, pl. 29), is particularly relevant.





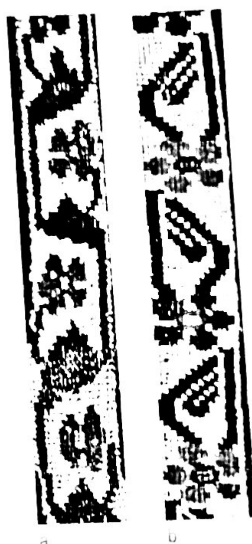
a

51

Sikh Kababi
North of Sa'uj Bulagh,
Eastern Kurdistan
first half of the 19th century
3'5"x 8'6"(105 x 261 cm)
wool pile on a wool
foundation

This rug has the same *sikh kababi* pattern as plate 24 (a) but "drawn" in a more naive, tribal, manner: a continuously repeating design composed of a diagonal lattice formed by large leaves joined by rosettes. The pattern in the main border, consisting of "in-and-out" hooked triangles, is found on some tribal rugs in Northern Kurdistan and the Caucasus and is often drawn in such a way as to suggest birds (see plate 70). The floral meander in the outer yellow guard border is found on the rugs of many groups of Persian tribes.




a b

52

Shrubs on Blue Ground
Sa'uj Bulagh area,
Eastern Kurdistan
late 18th century
6'0"x 10'11"(188 x 333 cm)
wool pile on a wool
foundation

This late eighteenth-century shrub carpet is an example of a relatively rare sub-group affiliated with the Sa'uj Bulagh area weaving school. The freestanding flowering shrubs appear as individualistic arboreal representations, while the graceful, sensuous, and flowing major border bemuses the viewer's eye. Other shrub examples illustrated here (see plates 6, 7, and 34) have a more naturalistic rendering. The inner minor border (a) is similar to that in plate 42 (b), and this rug also has red wefts and a corrosive brown field. It is submitted that this form of geometrical shrub is probably a traditional design woven by one of the specific Kurdish mountain tribal groups that encircle the market city of Sa'uj Bulagh.




a

53

Medallions with Birds and Goats
Varamin, Elburz Mountains and environs
first half of the 19th century
4'1"x 11'10"(124 x 361 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

A long, narrow rug with a single vertical row of small, irregularly "drawn" medallions consisting either of diamonds with "animal head" finials or a serrated motif called "shark's mouth." Between these, small animals (possibly goats) and birds confront each other. The elegant, abstract meander in the inner red-ground border is probably derived from the patterns used on *jajims* (flatwoven rugs made up of long, narrow woven strips sewn together vertically). The jagged floral meander in the ivory guard border resembles the border in plate 70, while the series of squares with hooked extensions at top and bottom (a) in the blue secondary border is a tribal pattern found in carpets of Azerbaijan. The foothills of the Elburz Mountains, the area where this rug was probably woven, witnessed a great influx of tribes including Kurds, Afshars, and Lors forcibly resettled by Nadir Shah and subsequently by Qajar rulers. This piece may have been woven by descendants of some of the Kurdish groups that had settled on the Varamin plain.



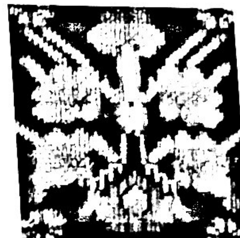


a

Shrubs in Lattice
Zanjan
mid-19th century
4'3"x 6'6"(130 x 198 cm)
wool pile on wool warps
and cotton wefts

A naive, tribal version of the "shrub lattice" seen on a number of rugs in this collection, perhaps in its most accomplished form on the rug illustrated in plate 6. The structure and palette of the present example indicate that it may be a weaving from Kurdish tribes living north of Zanjan. The minor borders are a variation of stars and leaves associated with tribal weavings of Azerbaijan. The use of the "Teshup-Zelan star" design (see page 91) in octagons (a) in the main border may indicate that the weaver was a descendant of Shanbo Kurds.





a

55

Lattice with Flowers
Zanjan
mid-19th century
4'5"x 9'3"(135 x 282 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Wool quality, palette, structure (including the selvedges overcast with supplementary yarns), and the overall field lattice all indicate that this is a rug woven by Kurds residing south of Karaja, near Zanjan. The main border pattern of individual shrubs (a) is also a Kurdish characteristic and is reminiscent of designs in the Berlin Museum "garden" rug mentioned in the caption to plate 46. The minor borders, with their reciprocal trefoil pattern, are not exclusively used by the Kurds but are frequently found on weavings by Kurdish clans.

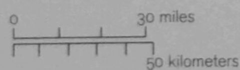
Northern Kurdistan






OTTOMAN EMPIRE
RUSSIAN EMPIRE
PERSIAN EMPIRE
Ardahan
Shuragol
Kars-Ardahan
Gumri
to Tbilisi
Shirakan
Kars
Zakatali
Lake Sevan
Narman
Majangird
Sardarabad
Kelbajar
Erivan (Yerevan)
Kazak
Jevanshir
Erzurum
Khorasan
Kagizman
Araxes
Erzurum
Mt. Ararat
to Ankara & the Mediterranean
Elashgird
Lachin
Khamur
Diyadin
Zangazur
BAYAZID PRINCIPALITY
Bayazid (Bayezit)
Maku
Khinis
Araxes
Gamgam
Manzikert
Bayazid
Nakhchivan
Murat
Julfa
Urdubad
Akhlat
Mush
Lake Van
Chaldiran
Bitlis
Khoy
Bitlis
Hizan
Van
Selmas
ROZHAKI PRINCIPALITY
Khoshab
Dilmaghan
Muk
Alpagh
Shirwan
Muka
Van
Hakkari Heights
Tabriz
Redvan
Sa'ird (Siirt)
SHANBO PRINCIPALITY
Lake Urmia
Hakkari
Diza
Hartush
Jilamerg (Hakkari)
Greater Zab
Urmia
Tigris
Elki
Jazira (Cezire)
Mt. Judi
Jilu
Shamdinan
Herki
Dirik
Amadia
Nisibin
BOKHTI PRINCIPALITY
Badinan
Herki
Ushnu
Miyan Do'ab
Badinan
SORAN PRINCIPALITY
Dahuk
Revand
Daryas
to Baghdad
Shaykhan
Revanduz
Sa'uj Bulagh (Mahabad)

above **Map of the main weaving areas of Northern Kurdistan, circa 1835.**



weaving area

area with Kurdish majority (approximate)

major commercial route

international border



The annual precipitation in Northern Kurdistan is well above the evaporation rate, and feeds a dense system of largely unused rivers. Only toward the west and the north does the ruggedness of the land give way to level valleys suitable for large-scale agriculture and major cities.

Considering the difficult terrain and the harsh climate, which together act as natural defenses, it is surprising to note that in the past five centuries no section of Kurdistan has seen more wars and destruction than Northern Kurdistan. As a result, there are relatively few inhabitants despite its vast size (the second largest among all the subdivisions). But this harsh environment was man-made and is a relatively recent occurrence. The deforestation and environmental abuse inflicted upon Northern Kurdistan is extreme. For hundreds of years the natural environment suffered intentional destruction via a "scorched earth" policy, as various warring empires used the area as a battlefield. As recently as 1914, systematic burning of the remaining forests of Northern Kurdistan, from Majangird (Sarikamis) to Van, was undertaken as a military tactic by the Imperial Russian and Ottoman forces. The practice continues in other parts of Kurdistan to the present day, but in Northern Kurdistan there is little forestland left to burn. The natural environment has gone through a fundamental degradation, possibly rendering the present environmental desolation a permanent feature.

Prior to this man-made devastation, Northern Kurdistan had served as home to great cultures, the seat of many old civilizations. Ancient cultures and empires rose and prospered in the area. The ancient Hurrians and Urartians, the classical Gordyenes and Artaxiads, the medieval Dostakids and Shaharmans—all called Northern Kurdistan home. In fact, the first mention of the Kurds in history (in the form of "Kurti") as recorded by the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (r. 1114–1076 BC) was on the southern shores of Lake Van, as discussed in the Appendix essay. This area is the birthplace of the people who first came to call themselves Kurds, and it is the northern portion of the Kurdish heartland.

The region's ancient cities, including Bitlis (home of the famous Kurdish historian Prince Sharafuddin of Bitlis, the author of the 1597 history of the Kurdish dynasties, the *Sharafnama*), Van, Urmia (Reza'iyeh), Ushnu (Shnu), Jilamerg (Hakkari), Akhlat (Ahlat), Sa'ird, Mush (Mus), and Bayazid (where Ahmad Khani, one of the greatest Kurdish poets, first presented his versified version of the national epic, *Mem o Zin*), had all been populous urban centers for centuries, if not millennia. All suffered massive destruction and depopulation from the sixteenth century onward, and were largely laid waste in the course of the World War I. After more than seventy-five years of neglect some of these cities are just recovering: Van is now the most populous city in this sector and has become its seat. Since 1990 Van has overtaken Urmia in population because it has received massive numbers of Kurdish refugees escaping the war conditions in the surrounding countryside.

The western and northern parts of Northern Kurdistan once had a strong agricultural sector and an urban-based, trade-oriented economy. The many years of military campaigns, deportations, massacres, and environmental abuse have, not surprisingly, made the inhabitants inward-looking, strongly



right **Lake Van and the hill of Vankeles citadel, Northern Kurdistan.**

clannish, and economically and technologically the least developed in Kurdistan.

The northeast quarter of this division – from the northeast shores of Lake Van to the city of Kars – once constituted the western half of historical Armenia and was known as the Armenian plateau. Likewise, from Kars to Ardahan and Posof, the land once constituted the ancient territories of Colchis and Georgia. Only since the end of World War I have these areas become almost exclusively Kurdish in character. The Kurdish habitation in the areas that formed historical Armenia, Aran, Colchis, and Georgia is, however, ancient. Kurdish dynasties such as the Mihrakanids (of the Jevanshir clan) were ruling over the areas of Aran (the western half of the Republic of Azerbaijan) as early as the fifth century AD. The Kurdish Shadadid and Mamlanid dynasties reigned over these same areas for centuries in medieval times. The Ayyubid dynasty (from which in the twelfth century sprang the Kurdish leader Saladin, Richard the Lionheart's famous opponent) was native to Dvin – only 10 miles (16 km) southeast of modern Erivan, the capital of Armenia.

The wars between the Ottomans and the Persians in the sixteenth century caused vast numbers of Kurds, Armenians, and Turkomans to be forcibly relocated by both belligerent parties, ostensibly to get them out of harm's way – a harm which was, of course, created by the belligerents themselves. Entire cities were permanently laid waste; irrigation works, wells, and bridges were obliterated; and houses and villages were burned to prevent repopulation. The people in this district of Kurdistan paid dearly in the process. Kurds were deported to the far corners of Persia. Many died on the way; others were killed by xenophobic natives at their destinations; and some simply became assimilated into their surrounding communities. Others, however, survived to become the nucleus of modern detached Kurdish exclaves in Iran, the largest of which became the modern Khurasani Kurdish exclave (discussed below). Kurds were also deported westward by the Ottomans and relocated in central Anatolia where today they form another recognizable North Kurdish culture exclave (see section on Central Anatolian Exclave below). One can argue that what was Northern Kurdish culture is better preserved among the Kurdish communities of Khurasan and central Anatolia than in its former native land. After their deportation, these Kurds did not have to face a century of death and destruction, as did those left behind in Northern Kurdistan.

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whatever recovery Northern Kurdistan attempted was very slow and patchy. Most of its population was gone; most of its cities and farms were destroyed; and most of its overland commerce had been lost to the southern sea route: there was precious little left that Northern Kurdistan could use to revive itself.

The Russian advance into the northern Middle East and Kurdistan, beginning in 1801, introduced a new northern market for goods produced – or for goods that could be produced – in the area. Following two wars, the second of which ended in 1828, Russia annexed from Persia the entire Caucasus. As a result, from the early nineteenth century onward trade developed and thrived in Northern Kurdistan. The Russian Empire was European, and although it was the most backward



right **Kurdish women dancing, with musicians, Northern Kurdistan.**

European state in terms of its economy and technology, it was still a modern state and it opened the markets of the Caucasus to intensive Western commerce. Kurdistan bordered directly on the Russian territories and its economy benefited greatly, as goods could be shipped easily to and from the Russian and European markets. New roads, improved ports, and soon railroads further revitalized the Caucasian economy, bringing new life into the long stagnant economy of Northern Kurdistan. Merchants from the Russian Empire streamed into Northern Kurdistan, looking for goods to buy and markets for their own goods. The return of commerce after the Russians' arrival in the early nineteenth century and the re-energized commerce that they brought with them proved to be the shot in the arm needed for the revival of the ravaged land.

Nomadic woolen products such as rugs and kilims quickly found their ways into the markets of Tiflis (Tbilisi) and Baku, now under Russian jurisdiction, and thence to European Russia and beyond. Dyestuff, farm products, and livestock soon followed suit. The Russian purchases proved to be only the first. Other Europeans soon developed a taste for woolens, cotton goods, rugs, kilims, and various other textiles. The revived commerce also reinvigorated a very helpful surrogate merchant community in the area: the Armenians, who were strong catalysts in this commercial revival. The Armenian population was in its own right a prolific producer of fabrics and rugs, but it also promoted much of the Kurdish output alongside its own in the markets of Europe and later North America. The incipient wealth translated itself into a demographic boom in the area – first for the Armenians, and later for everybody else.

The revival of commerce in Northern Kurdistan also meant that the Ottomans took an increasing interest in this area, which they had neglected for so long. The nomadic tribes had been holding undisputed sway over their territories, paying practically no homage to the Ottomans or Persians. During the centuries of urban and commercial decline, the farming communities, if left unmolested, might have continued to some degree as vestiges of the old culture of Northern Kurdistan. But the scorched earth curse that was levied on the land devastated the agricultural communities every bit as much as it had the urban communities. Only the mobile and sturdy nomads, able quickly to get out of harm's way, had managed to survive these apocalyptic events. The abundance of pasturelands in the territory readily supported large-scale nomadism, and by the nomads' standards it never became truly desolate despite the incessant warfare that ravaged the cities and farms. As it had been for millennia, Northern Kurdistan continued to be a stronghold of Kurdish nomadism.

The nomadism in Northern Kurdistan gave rise to some of the largest Kurdish clans, which are still extant today. Some of these clans can be traced back more than two thousand years. The Piniani clan of the Hakkari and Van region is the same as that which was known as the Biniani to the ancients, from whose name is derived the name "Van" for the lake and the city. The Karkar clan is the same as the Kharkhar of the Akkadian sources; the Girdi are the ancient Qardu (Carduchi) of the Bible and the Greek histories, and the Gordyenes of the Roman authors; the Pisian (Paziki) are the modern descendants of the Phasians of the saga of Medea and Jason the Argonaut; and the Zhirakan are the Shirakan of the classical

right **Kurdish horsemen in Northern Kurdistan in 1886.**



Armenian texts. It seems extraordinary that these clans still inhabit some of the exact same areas that they did when they were first reported in history, although their numbers have been adversely affected by the events related above.

By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the very large tribal confederacies and major family clans were nearly all present in Northern Kurdistan just as they had been listed in 1597 by Sharafuddin, although not necessarily of the same size and importance as before. Some, like the large Jelali and the Shakak (Shikak) confederacies, had come into prominence between 1597 and 1835. Others, like the Mahmudi, had receded in importance. The major clans and confederacies of Northern Kurdistan in 1835 (see map, pages 10–11) included, from northeast to southeast, the Zhirakan, Galtri, Jelali, Spiki, Haidaran, Milan, Dimbuli, Khallikan, Shakak, Begzada, and Harki. In the middle were the Paziki, Hawerki, Shaykh Hasani, Banuki, Korasani, Mahmudi, Piniani, Girdi, and Barzani. From northwest to southwest were the Belikan, Jibran, Biliki, Motikan, Spayirdi, Shwan, and Hartushi. Myriad other clans and tribes inhabited the area in betwixt these major groups.[43]

The weaving traditions of these clans – like the clans themselves – were ancient indeed. The material was largely wool, procured in abundance from the vast herds of sheep and goats that roamed the nomadic pasturelands. Cotton, however, had to be imported from Western Kurdistan, as the lower summer temperatures did not allow for much local cotton cultivation. As a consequence, few of these tribal rugs contained cotton. Some silk and flax was produced in the immediate basin of Lake Van, but the production had declined greatly in quantity and repute since Marco Polo had visited the area and reported on the silk in the early fourteenth century.[44] Northern Kurdistan could produce much of the plant material and minerals needed for dyestuff, although all indigo had to be imported.

Compared with weavings from other sectors of Kurdistan, Northern Kurdish rugs seem to feature greater numbers of the heraldic emblems of the ancient clans. Heraldic emblems were extremely common among the Scythians and other Iranic peoples who settled Western and Central Asia as well as the Eurasian steppes, from Hungary to Mongolia.[45] It is not unreasonable to believe that the heraldic insignias woven into their rugs by the Kurds date back to ancient Aryan tribal settlers such as the Medes and the Sagarthians, who migrated to Kurdistan beginning in the second millennium BC. A study of the clan origins of these rug emblems (see plates 56 and 57) could shed light on Kurdish history as well as on its textile art, as certain clans continue to weave heraldic emblems into their textiles.

Except for the disappearance of the Armenian and Assyrian communities from most of Northern Kurdistan, the linguistic and religious groups of today have not appreciably changed from those of the 1830s. The population was and is almost wholly North Kurmanji-speaking, with some minor communities of Dimili (Zaza) speakers to the west and northwest of the subdivision. Sunni Islam was and is the religion of the majority, although there is a strong minority of Alevis in the northernmost reaches of the subdivision, between Kars and Ardahan. A large Yarsani religious community inhabited the general area near Maku, but this has shrunk appreciably since 1835, first losing converts to the new religions of Babism and



left **Hakkari Kurd, Northern Kurdistan, 1890.**

right **Kurdish tribesmen of Northern Kurdistan, 1886.**



Baha'ism, and later to the onslaught of Ottoman and Russian troops in the course of World War I. The thriving Jewish and Christian communities of 1835 are largely gone today.

The Kurdish weavers living in Northern Kurdistan generally weave bolder, more abstract, more geometrical rugs and kilims than the Kurds inhabiting the southern and eastern districts.

The Hakkari Heights are the most inaccessible mountains in all of Kurdistan, and constitute its northern heartland. They comprise the area where the Zagros Mountains (which run generally northwest–southeast in Persia) join the eastern Taurus Mountains (which run generally east–west in Turkey) like a hinge. The area's narrow, deep, remote canyons and ravines are the beds of rapid rivers, requiring suspension bridges for travel. For months in the winter the Hakkari area is virtually inaccessible because of snowfall. The rugged ravines are interspersed with fertile plains and pasture for the numerous herds of angora goats and broad-tailed sheep.

Northern Herki and Harki

The Harki (Haraki) are a sub-group of the Herki clan living in Persian territory northwest of Sa'uj Bulagh; the northern Herki live in Turkish territory as far north as the Hakkari Heights. Their weavings are similar in construction, design, and color to those of the southern Herki (see Central Kurdistan, above).

Hakkari Heights

Identifying the weavings of the various clans inhabiting the Hakkari Heights is difficult. Due to the area's inaccessible mountains and the inward nature of its people, little is known about its antique weavings. Only since the late 1990s have archeologists been allowed to visit the Hakkari Heights and collect artifacts. In situ research would be helpful to match heraldic symbols with the clans in order to identify their weaving.

The Shanbo ruled in the Hakkari Heights over many diverse mountain clans until the middle of the nineteenth century.[46] The oldest mention of this name is found in the second century AD, when Ptolemy referred to the Hakkari region as the "Shambo [Shanbo] Region."[47] In 1440, the Egyptian historian Maqrizi recorded among the Kurdish clans of Hakkari one named Shanboki,[48] which is presumably the Shanbo clan. Sharafuddin's *Sharafnama* of 1597 includes a chapter entitled "The Rulers of Hakkari Known as the Shanbo."[49] The chapter relates the various diplomatic and military skirmishes that the Shanbo had and were having with the Ottoman and Persian empires. It also reflects that the Shanbo had been Yezidi in religion but converted to Islam in the fifteenth century. A hooked diamond heraldic emblem often seen in their weavings (see page 29) is a singular motif produced by the clans living to the north, south, and east of the Hakkari region.[50] Their old carpets, as witnessed in plates 56 and 57, have powerful energy and abstracted symbolism.

Lake Urmia

The weavings of some of the clans north of the Hakkari are not as difficult to identify. The eastern side of the mountains of Hakkari subsides into the plain of Urmia, a fertile agricultural area. Many Armenians, Assyrian Christians, Syrian Christians, and Afshars lived in this plain when J. Baillie Fraser visited in

right **The rock and citadel of Van, Northern Kurdistan, as seen by Isabella Bird in 1890.**



1834.[51] It was reported that there were twenty-seven varieties of grape grown here, and raisins were exported to Russia.

Shakak

The Shakak (Shikak) were and are a large and important weaving clan located west of Lake Urmia (see map, pages 10–11). The Shakak territory went as far south as the Hakkari Heights. Their weavings often feature semi-geometrical designs of tree and flower origin. Historically, many of them were members of the Yarsani (Ahl-i-Haqq) religion, and often employed the pond turtle (*raqa*) – a motif of religious significance to the Yarsanis – in their field compositions (see plate 64).

Shaqaqi

The Shaqaqi are offshoots of the Shakak clan. Sometime after the Treaty of Zohab established temporary peace between the Ottoman and Persian empires in 1639 (after 125 years of almost constant war), a large group of Shakak migrated southeast from their territories west of Urmia to settle in the plains of Azerbaijan. Since antiquity the Persians had called these plains "The Fields of Paradise" because of their fertile soil. The Persian farmers who for centuries had grown abundant crops there had been devastated by the warfare in the sixteenth century and had left to settle and farm further east, near Isfahan. The urban populations had also left because of the wars. The new immigrants to this vacated area, the Shakak, became known as the Shaqaqi and they prospered because the fertile soil produced lush, verdant crops and grass for nourishing their flocks.

The Shaqaqi were valiant warriors and for the next three hundred years assisted the shahs of Persia in their military campaigns. They were also prolific weavers, and their wool, because of the excellent grazing grounds used by their sheep, was of the finest quality. They dominated the area of Azerbaijan from Maragha and Takab to Zanjan and Khalkhal, as well as the important market town of Karaja (see map, page 11). The Shaqaqi frequently used the Hakkari-Shanbo hooked-diamond heraldic device in their weavings (see, for example, plate 65), which leads one to postulate that the Shakak tribe was either ruled by or was a part of the Shanbo and that the design emigrated with the Shakak when they moved to the fertile plains. Another heraldic emblem appears in Shaqaqi weavings, resembling crossed arrows within a square (plate 68). This emblem also relates back to the Shanbo dynasty.

The Shaqaqi were originally Kurdish-speaking and practiced Sunni Islam when they came to Azerbaijan. Turkic tribes from Sultaniya and the Zanjan area also expanded into the same fertile plains to take advantage of the rich soil. The incoming Turkic population was Shi'ite Muslim, the official religion of Persia, and Turkic-speaking, as were most of the inhabitants of Azerbaijan. From exposure to the Shi'ite Turkic people and Shi'ite proselytizers, the Shaqaqi began adopting Shi'ite Islam by the middle of the nineteenth century. At present only a very few old members of the Shaqaqi clan speak Kurdish. They have become Shi'ites *in toto*, and speak Azeri Turkic as their main language.

The Shaqaqi may no longer "qualify" culturally as Kurds, nor do their lands qualify as part of "Kurdistan." Nevertheless, examples of their fine weaving from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when they were "Kurdish" are included in this book (see plates 65–68).



left **Kurds of Van in 1890.**

right **The rock of Van, fortified as the capital of the Urartu kingdom, circa eighth century BC.**



Van

From Urmia north to Van, hills rise to as high as 11,000 feet (3,300 meters), with one great mountain saddle, the Chakh Dagh range, to be crossed. In the mountains south of Van and on the Van plateau lived a large population of rural Armenians who were agriculturalists and pastoralists. According to James Bryce,[52] from 1877 onward the Armenians living in the area were either killed or fled due to atrocities instigated by the Turks and carried out largely by the Kurds. Kurds who lived in the mountainous areas east of Van produced fine weavings, some of which are included in this book.

Jelali

The old khanate of Jelali, with its principal city of Maku, was situated northeast of Lake Van. The Jelali area bordered Mt. Ararat and the Caucasus in the north and Persian Azerbaijan in the east. Several nomadic clans inhabited the area. With their geometric designs Jelali weavings resemble those of their Caucasian neighbors, but with more muted colors. They employ natural brown wool warp and weft. Their designs are abstract and are often enclosed within geometrically drawn squares, hexagons, and octagons.

Kars–Ardahan

Prior to World War I the city of Kars – much like other cities in eastern Anatolia – was populated by Armenians and other non-Kurdish ethnic groups. Living in the mountains of the Kars–Ardahan area, however, was a large population of Kurds who wove rugs and kilims for their own use and for sale. Their weavings were exported by Armenian merchants to Russian traders, and quite a few have ended up in the United States. With geometric designs, their weavings resemble Caucasian rugs but have a different color palette. A dark brown natural wool is frequently used in their construction for both warp and weft, and many of the pieces I have examined have the so-called "Memling *gul*" motif (see plate 80).

The Caucasus

Pockets of Kurds have existed in the western part of the Caucasus Mountains for centuries, during the area's various periods of domination by the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires. The Kurdish weavers who live here use similar designs to those of their neighboring weavers – the Georgians, Armenians, and Azeris – but in a different manner and employing differing dye sources. An example is the "serrated leaf and calyx" (*lawlaw o kajina*) border, which is very popular with both the Kurds and the Azeris. As usual, the dyestuffs and colour combinations employed are determining factors in identifying these weavings as Kurdish.

Zakatali, now called Zakatella, is east of Kars in the northwest Caucasus. A small Kurdish population had resided here for centuries. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Kurds who were members of the radical Yezidi branch of Yazadism, the "Cult of Angels," were forced by the Ottomans to leave Aleppo and the Sinjar Mountains southwest of Mosul; they fled to the mountains of Zakatali. The Yezidi sect revered "Sheitan" (Satan), the negative force, and for this belief they were persecuted for centuries by Muslims and Christians.[53] Today Zakatella is ninety percent Armenian, with some Kurds still residing in the surrounding Aragat Mountains.

right **Mount Ararat, Northern Kurdistan.**





56


a

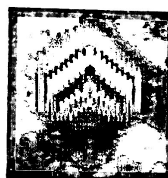

b

overleaf detail of plate 56

Large Medallion
Shanbo, Hakkari region,
Northern Kurdistan
second half of the
17th century
5'10"x 10'6"(179 x 323 cm)
wool pile on a wool
foundation

This magnificent carpet, with an imposing green medallion on an abrashed red field, was probably woven in the Hakkari region and has a veritable feast of designs and symbols. The Shanbo diamond device with four extruding hooks (a) is found in four white-ground octagonal medallions flanking the large medallion; at their center is the star symbolizing the Hurrian weather god Teshup, a motif later adopted by the Zelan kings. Four prominent abyss medallions (b), perhaps a Yazdani religious acknowledgment, each contains a representation of turtles radiating from the center along with crossed bar devices. The small blue field medallion in the center of the rug also displays the "Teshup-Zelan star." Other prominent devices enclosed in lined "containers" presumably represent significant heraldic devices of the confederated tribes ruled by the Shanbo. The size of the carpet and the prominent use of the various heraldic devices may indicate that this *tour-de-force* was woven for a Shanbo khan.




a

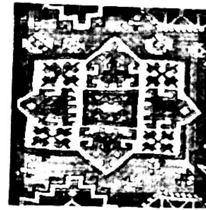
57

Trees, Flowers, and Heraldic Panels
Hakkari Heights, Northern Kurdistan
circa 1700
6'10"x 10'10"
(208 x 330 cm)
incomplete, wool pile on wool warps and wool and cotton wefts

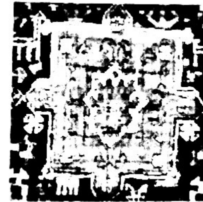
The design of this worn red-ground carpet is composed of horizontal rows of alternating ornaments. In the upper row are hooked medallions and pairs of ivory serrated-edged leaves, which can also be seen on classical Persian and Caucasian rugs of the seventeenth century. Among the other motifs still discernable in the field are typically Kurdish versions of cypress and pomegranate trees, large floral forms, and the representation of a dragon and bird in combat. Within ivory panels in a row in the lower half are heraldic devices containing blue "Teshup-Zelan stars" with hooked extensions surrounded by four crescent moons, probably the armorial bearings of a particular tribe. Also present are "flaming palmettes," as seen on plate 47 (a). The large size and the design of this rug, which is now rather worn and missing parts of its borders, suggest that it might well have been woven for an emir or khan of one of the tribes located in the Hakkari Heights.



58



a



b

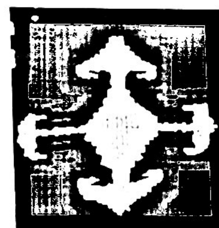
Hakkari Long Carpet
Hakkari,
Northern Kurdistan
18th century
6′2″x 11′5″(188 x 348 cm)
wool pile on a wool
foundation

Prior to the nineteenth century and the destruction of the Kurds' various kingdoms and fiefdoms, Kurdish carpets were an eloquent expression of the strength and independence of their weavers – as evidenced by this piece. The two large diamond-shaped medallions have the green–blue color juxtaposition favored by the Kurds. The smaller central abyss medallion features representations of "turtles" similar to those seen in the abyss medallions of plate 56 (a). The motifs within the boxes at each corner of the piece are similar to those within the abyss medallions of the Herki piece depicted in plate 23 (b), and the symbols and muskas placed throughout the field are also similar. The elongated reciprocal trefoil border shows the individuality of design and color that characterizes early Kurdish work.





a



b

59

Medallions with Talismanic Devices
Southeast quarter of Northern Kurdistan
mid-19th century
4'0"x 11'6" (122 x 351 cm)
kilim, tapestry weave in wool

The field of this kilim is filled with a column of four large diamond-shaped medallions, the upper three with a soft red-ground interior and the lower one with a blue interior. The background color of the field changes through its length. This may have been done intentionally, or may be the result of the weaver simply using whatever color wool was to hand. Similar variations in color occur in the outer brown border. This kilim illustrates the Kurdish penchant for using a wide variety of motifs significant to their clans. We can see combs, ewers, goblets, flowers, *muskas* (good luck talismans) (a), dromedaries, dancing men, a man feeding his falcons, and the so-called "Hakkari-Shanbo *gul*" device (b). The overall use of such motifs in this manner suggests that this kilim may have been woven in the southeast corner of Northern Kurdistan.





a



b

Red Field
Hakkari region,
Northern Kurdistan
circa 1800
2'7"x 12'7" (79 x 384 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Like the rug illustrated in plate 5, this has a plain stately field (*met hane*) piled in red. The field has beautiful variations in color along its length. Large expanses of a single color in varying shades and texture have long appealed to collectors for their subtle simplicity, as can be seen today in certain examples of modern art. The palmette repeat in the border (a, b) is similar to a design found on a rare group of east Anatolian rugs, presumably Kurdish, which have a series of vertical stripes containing these motifs used as a field pattern (see *Hali*, 61, p. 42; *Hali*, 64, advertisement p. 49).





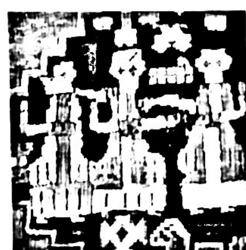
a

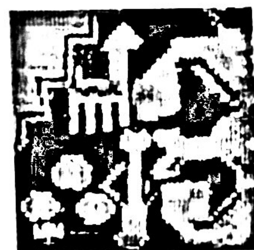
61

Medallions and Talismans
Hakkari region, Northern Kurdistan
mid-19th century
2'9"x 5'4"(84 x 163 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Flanking the large multi-rayed star-like medallions in the field are many tribal talismans such as ewers, earrings, birds in flight, an hourglass, combs, and stylized flowers. The Herki appear to have had a penchant for weaving talismans into their work. The main border pattern is a geometric version of a "palmette and stem" meander (a). This beautifully colored and unusual rug is attributed to the Hakkari area.




a


b

Stepped Diamond Medallions
Near Lake Urmia, Northern Kurdistan
first half of the 19th century
3'10"x 12'0"(117 x 336 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Six stepped-diamond medallions are arranged in a single vertical row down the center of the field. Within them are totemic devices presumably indigenous to the tribal group living near Lake Urmia which made this beautiful carpet. Flanking the diamonds are devices that resemble insects with folded wings and antennae – perhaps butterflies. Above the lowest diamond are six dancers in tribal costume (a) with their hands on each other's shoulders. Possibly they are engaged in a formal dance, a favorite pastime among all tribes in the Middle East, which the weaver of this rug wished to commemorate. However, it is possible that what is depicted is a wedding dance, which would suggest that this rug was made as a dowry weaving. Below the lowest diamond are two more tiny human figures, arms akimbo and each tending what appears to be a goat (b).





a

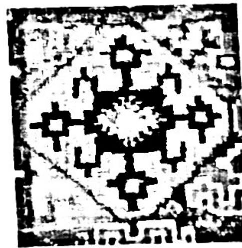
63

Birds' Heads within Square Medallions

Possibly Shakak, west of Lake Urmia, Northern Kurdistan
18th century
4'4"x 8'0" (132 x 244 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

This heavy, thickly woven rug has a rugged and primitive appearance. The field is chromatically divided into compartments; within each "box" is a diamond-in-diamond motif, each with hooked extensions which resemble confronting birds' heads. The ground colors of the "boxes" – red, pink, blue, and green – are still brilliant despite two hundred years of oxidation. The outer yellow-ground minor border contains a series of *muskas* (good luck talismans); these are often worn by women in the form of silver jewelry, both for protection against the "evil eye" and to bring fertility and happiness. The trifoliate central medallion with its bluish ground may be this clan's interpretation of the *hauzi* (abyss) in which a turtle (a) (the representative of Khidir) swims. This, in turn, may indicate that the weaver was using an old design device from the Yazdani religion.




a

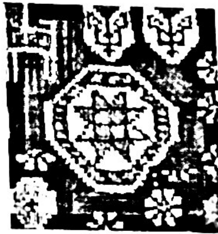

b

Pond Turtles in Lozenges
Possibly Shakak, west of Lake Urmia, Northern Kurdistan
early 19th century
4'7"x 6'5" (140 x 196 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

This rug may be a Shakak clan weaving from the early nineteenth century. The field has asymmetrically offset rows of diamond lozenges, three or more to each row, within each of which is a stylized pond turtle (a). In the interstices are angular cloudbands. The depiction of turtles is frequently encountered on Shakak rugs, as they were members of the Ahl-i-Haqq branch of the Yazdani religion. The "running dog" (or "mountain") guard border pattern is a commonly used minor border. The archaic design in the main border may be seen as a series of flowers (b) (although some of them have a distinctly bird-like appearance). These motifs are occasionally encountered on other tribal rugs and are clearly related to the design seen in the main border of the rug in plate 20, attributed to the Diza'i clan. Jon Thompson illustrated a later rug (see Barbican Art Gallery, 1983, p. 119) with a related border, the rug itself being described as a typical Kurdish weaving from the Kelardasht region of northwest Persia. This rug has an all-wool foundation of natural undyed light and dark brown yarns.



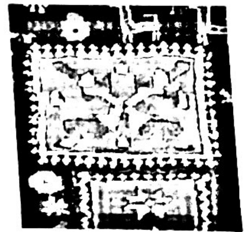
65



a



b

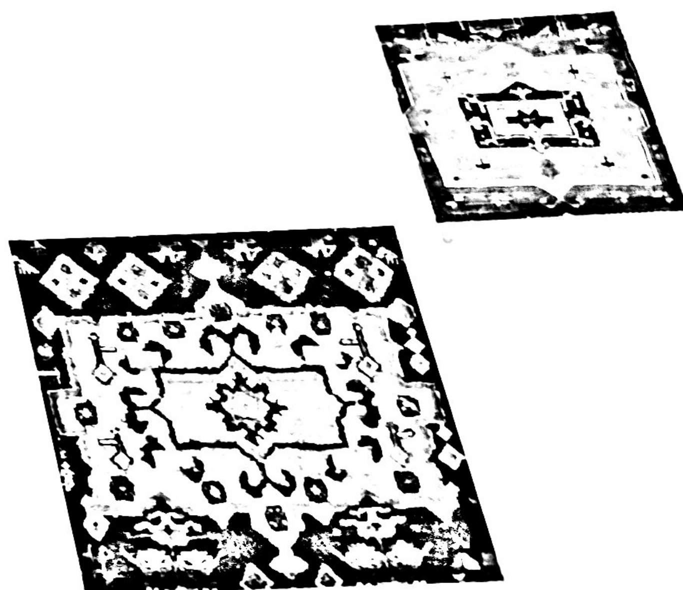


c

Medallions Surrounded by Motifs
Shaqaqi, near Karaja
circa 1800
3'5"x 11'8" (104 x 356 cm)
wool pile on wool warps and cotton wefts

The form of these medallions is that usually associated with rugs woven in the Karaja area, near where this rug was made by Shaqaqi Kurds. Among the plethora of specifically Kurdish motifs are the "Teshup-Zelan star" (a) and the "Hakkari-Shanbo *gul*" (b), as well as amulets, trees, animals, and, on the top side of the largest medallion, a small heraldic motif consisting of two small blue rectangles with crossed "arrow-head" devices (c). Many Shaqaqi rugs have a similar series of medallions down the field, the central one here having what looks like a downward-pointing prayer arch or *mihrab*, which may be a water pond. Most Shaqaqi rugs that I have seen have been long and narrow, presumably because this is the usual shape of the main room in their homes.



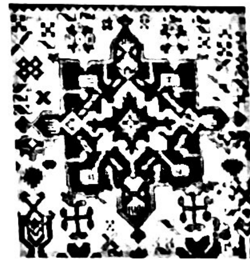


a

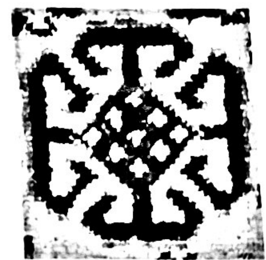
Six Abyss Medallions
Shaqaqi, near Karaja
18th century
3'9" x 12'10" (114 x 391 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The medallions on this *kenare* (side carpet), representing the abyss, are of the form typically associated with the Karaja area. Within each is a polygon with double or single "bird's head" extensions, suggesting the "Hakkari-Shanbo *gul*," and a central starred palmette (a). Note the similarity between this rectangular device and that in the largest medallion in plate 65 (c). However, the cruciforms within the latter are more closely paralleled by the rectangles repeated in the main border of this long rug. Note also the similarities between the main medallions of this rug, those of plate 67, and those of a rug attributed to the Herki (plate 23). The soft Azerbaijani wool, the palette, and the distinctive combinations of colour all point to a Shaqaqi weaving. The spaciousness of the drawing and the smoothness of the back indicate considerable age.





a



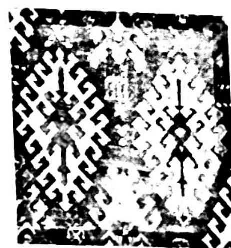
b

Three Abyss Medallions
Shaqaqi, near Karaja
first half of the 19th century
3'4" x 5'9" (102 x 175 cm)
incomplete in length,
wool pile on a wool
foundation

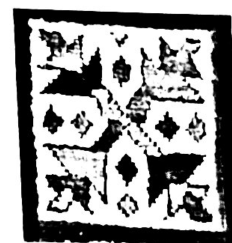
The field contains large "abyss" medallions ( ) of characteristic Karaja form against an unusual soft yellow background. This rug has been reduced in length across the base, cutting off the bottom section of two "Hakkari-Shanbo *guls*". Two complete *guls* appear further up the rug ( ). The primary border depicts inward- and outward-pointing palmettes alternating with multicolored eight-pointed stars against an ivory ground. The floral meander in the two red-ground guards is called *shudur* ("almond flower") and is a border used by many groups of Persian tribal weavers as well as on urban rugs and on some Ersari Turkoman weavings from Turkmenistan and Afghanistan.



68



a



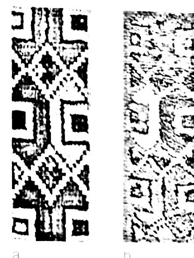
b

Hooked Medallions
Probably Shaqaqi,
near Karaja
first half of the 19th century
4'0" x 11'10" (122 x 361 cm)
wool pile on a cotton
foundation

The palette, the heavy thick handle, the medallions with "bird's head" latch-hook extensions (a), and the two white-ground squares at each end of the piece containing crossed arrow devices (b) (which are possibly tribe-specific armorials; see plate 65) all indicate a Shaqaqi origin. However, the foundation is entirely of hand-spun cotton, an unusual feature for a Shaqaqi Kurdish weaving. Nevertheless, the treatment of the selvedge – six bundles of two "body" warps wrapped in bands of pile yarn – is typical of Kurdish work and is not found on weavings by non-Kurdish groups in Azerbaijan such as the Shahsavan or those groups living near Sarab and Karadagh.



69


a b

Hexagonal Medallions and Hazelnut Trees
Possibly Khallikan, east of Lake Van, Northern Kurdistan
dated 1232 AH (AD 1816–17)
3'2"x 13'4" (97 x 406 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The central field contains eight large multicolored hexagonal medallions against a dark blue background. At the center of each medallion is a series of overlaid diamonds. Large confronting "bird's head" hooks extend from the outer diamonds. The diamonds, hooks, and hexagons all have stepped sides, as if they were copied from a kilim tapestry; the tree-like motifs that fill the background are more typical of pile weavings. The hexagonal medallions themselves, with their diamond centers and hook extensions, are typical of the work of Kurdish weavers living to the south and east of Lake Van in eastern Anatolia. These medallions are also found on kilims; some anthropologists consider them to be fertility symbols. This area is famous for its hazelnut trees, which may have inspired the small, stylized trees arranged in pairs flanking the base of each medallion. It is interesting that the border pattern seen here ( ) appears also on the rug illustrated in plate 96 ( ), which was woven by the Kurds of Yunak in central Anatolia after they moved from the Lake Van area in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This is one of the few dated Kurdish rugs and thus is interesting as a benchmark. An in-woven date is not necessarily reliable for a variety of reasons, but it may be useful to specify the exact year of manufacture after determining the age by factors such as colors, designs, handle, and appearance of the front and back when compared with other weavings. By its external characteristics this rug appears to date from the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The date in this rug narrows the time within that quarter of a century to 1816–17.





a b c

Hexagonal Medallions and Birds
Southeast of Lake Van, Northern Kurdistan
second half of the 18th century
3'3"x 8'3" (99 x 251 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

This rug, with large hexagons and "bird's head" diamonds as seen on plates 69 and 71, was probably woven in the area to the southeast of Lake Van. The field is divided by the overall design itself into a series of seven horizontal panels. The large birds, which alternate with the hexagons, resemble those found on weavings by the Shahsavan both in the central part of Azerbaijan and further north in the border region between Persia and the former Soviet Union. The motifs in the main border, found on many groups of tribal rugs, take more clearly recognizable avian forms on this eighteenth-century rug (a) than on later examples such as plates 51 (b) and 78 (c). The undyed dark and medium brown wool used for the foundation, as well as the palette itself, indicates a Kurdish origin. The smoothness and aged appearance of the back and the tone of the colors indicate that this rug is almost half a century older than that shown in plate 69.




a

71

Hexagonal Medallions
Southeast of Lake Van,
Northern Kurdistan
dated 1229 AH (AD 1813–14)
6'0"x 10'0"(185 x 307 cm)
kilim, tapestry weave
in wool

The multicolored hexagons are set against a dark blue field, which interlocks with the red trefoil border. This kilim was arguably made within three or four years of the pile rug illustrated in plate 69, and was probably woven by the same tribal group responsible for that rug and the one in plate 70. The "bird's head" motif (a) within hexagons probably constitute a totemic emblem of this particular weaving clan, as it appears in all three rugs. This must be one of the oldest extant dated kilims with this pattern, but we can be certain that the totemic symbolism stretches back many centuries.



Four Medallions

West of Lake Van,
Northern Kurdistan
first half of the 19th century
3'7" x 9'3" (109 x 282 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Four irregularly shaped octagonal medallions in different combinations of red and blue ascend the field of this carpet, which was probably made to the west of Lake Van. The diamonds with "bird's head" latch-hooks seen as border devices and inner medallions in other rugs from Northern Kurdistan are here used as "dividers" in the field between the large octagons. Rugs of this provenance with a white ground are comparatively rare. This example has a foundation of natural, undyed wool with three or four shoots between each row of knots.



73


a b

Flowers and Hooked Medallions
Possibly Paziki,
Northern Kurdistan
first half of the 19th century
3'8"x 6'10"(112 x 208 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Stylized rosettes, alternating with dividing rows of small medallions with "bird's head" latch-hooks and "Teshup-Zelan stars" in hexagons, are placed against a soft red background. This field design is associated with Paziki Kurds, by whom this piece may have been made. The primary border is composed of hexagonal cartouches with horned *kotchanaks* against a dark brown ground. This motif is similar to those seen in Turkoman border designs from both sides of the Caspian Sea as well as Turkey. The minor borders (a) have the *shudur* meander seen on plate 67 (c).





a

Lattice on Red

Northern Kurdistan
mid-19th century
3'3"x 6'11"(99 x 211 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The red field of this rug has a simple thin diagonal lattice that forms small diamond shapes. The color of the lattice varies from blue to yellow. A few of the diamonds are strikingly filled in with blue. The small red and yellow lines that separate the borders are often seen on Kazak rugs, as is the inner border with inward- and outward-facing triangles (a). Here we can clearly see that the weaver made no attempt to resolve the corners of the main border: the side borders are abruptly cut off by the upper and lower borders, which are themselves abruptly cut off by the outer minor border of red and yellow stripes. This feature is also typical of Anatolian and Caucasian carpets.







a b

75

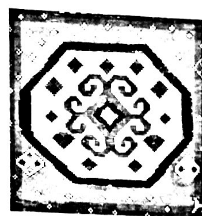
Three Medallions
Northern Kurdistan
circa 1800 or earlier
3'3" x 5'10" (100 x 179 cm)
incomplete, wool pile on a wool foundation

This very attractive rug has the clarity in design, spaciousness, and harmony of colors that are frequently encountered in earlier woven rugs. I have not seen another piece of its type; thus it is difficult to date and place with a specific tribe. It has a central field divided into three compartments, each edged on the inside with a reciprocal trefoil border. These compartments have a hooked medallion within a rectangle in their center. A narrow white border decorated with a pattern of small repeating rosettes interspersed with animals, human figures (a, b), and geometric shapes, surrounds the field and separates the compartments. The same tiny rosettes appear in the primary border between larger rosettes and eight-pointed stars, on a dark aubergine ground. The combination of large and small rosettes is a typical feature of Talish rugs from the Lenkoran region on the Caspian coast, southeast Caucasus. The larger rosette can first be seen in the same style on Tabriz workshop carpets of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

The stylized rosettes in the main border relate back to Assyrian stone "rugs" (see page 155), and the stars in the center of the medallions and in the main border relate to the "Teshup-Zelan star," as in plate 22 ( ). The depiction of people and animals in a weaving is a common Kurdish tribal characteristic.



76



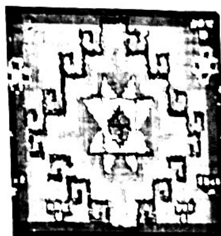
d

Garden Carpet
Possibly Shahsavan, northeast Persia
circa 1800
5'8"x 7'9" (173 x 236 cm)
wool pile on wool warps and cotton wefts

The so-called "tree Kazaks," of which this is an example, most probably do not belong to the large group of rugs woven in the Caucasus that are known as "Kazaks." Collectors have puzzled over the interesting construction of this small group of weavings, which (unlike other Kazaks) have thick cotton wefting. The clear enunciation here of the "Hakkari-Shanbo *gul*" – seen within the central hexagonal medallions (d) and also prominently displayed in a box in the center of the rug – suggests a Northern Kurdistan origin for this group. Other examples, such as a rug from the McMullan Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (see McMullan, 1965, pp. 192–93, no. 47), and a piece formerly in this author's collection and published in *Oriental Rugs from Pacific Collections* (see Fort Mason, 1990, no. 205), do not have the Hakkari-Shanbo device in the medallions but rather a garden pattern similar to the Aynt'ab carpet in plate 85. Antecedent versions of this group – a small number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century long carpets that feature vertical columns of naturalistically rendered trees flanking ponds – are usually referred to in the literature as "southern Caucasian" or "northwest Persian" for lack of a known origin. An example illustrated by Ulrich Schürmann (1965, pp. 58–59, pl. 2) appears to be the oldest. The designs, the colors, and the treatment of the main border of the Schürmann rug are sophisticated and superb. A piece sold at auction in Paris (see *Hali*, 81, 1995, p. 119) has the naturalistic trees in the field but a tribal main border more similar to the border of this example. The small motifs that appear in the field of the geometric-style tree rugs resemble those often seen in the work of Kurds in the Shahsavan area of northeast Persia. Perhaps this group was woven by Kurds who formerly lived in the southern Hakkari area but who migrated to the Shahsavan area.







77

Memling Gul
Probably south Caucasus
first half of the 19th century
3'1"x 7'0"(95 x 215 cm)
wool pile on a wool
foundation

The field is divided into five lateral bands, each with a large hexagon at the center. Seen overall, the effect is one of a bold, zigzag pattern. Within each hexagon is a stepped rectangle with latch-hook extensions, a motif called the "Memling *gul*" ( ) because of its appearance on rugs in paintings by the fifteenth-century Flemish artist Hans Memling. These motifs, as well as the *lawlaw o kajina* ("leaf and calyx") border ( ) – seen in varying forms on the rugs in plates 13 ( ) and 65 ( ) – are found on a wide variety of rugs woven in the triangle where Turkey, Persia, and the Caucasus converge. The vivid, sumptuous colors and their combinations indicate a Kurdish origin, and the rug was probably made by Kurds living in the southern Caucasus. Its warps are of natural undyed brown and white wool, and the wefts are of natural brown wool.





a b

78

Offset Rows of Hexagonal Medallions
Northeast of Van,
Northern Kurdistan
late 19th century
3'11"x 7'2" (119 x 218 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

This rug has the vibrant colors, designs, and construction of Kurdish weavings produced northeast of Van toward Kars. The offset rows of small hexagonal medallions present a tile-like effect in the field. The minor *shudur* border pattern (a), seen also in plate 67 (b) and elsewhere, is found on many Kurdish tribal rugs. The weaver, when creating the major border, seems to have been unaware of its origin as a series of bird motifs. Designs are commonly unintentionally altered throughout the centuries in this way.



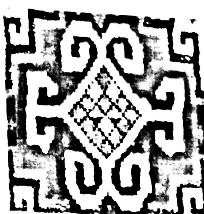
Hooked Medallions in Lattice

Kars environs,
Northern Kurdistan
first half of the 19th century
4'0"x 6'4"(122 x 193 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Rugs with field designs consisting of an overall rectangular grid with large hexagons and latch-hooked diamonds are woven in the mountainous region in the extreme northern part of Kurdistan, near Georgia and the city of Kars in east Anatolia. Other characteristics of such weavings that can be found in this rug include a foundation of a natural, undyed brown wool and a plethora of colors. The pattern, colors, and border scheme used here can also be found on Kazak and Genje rugs, although the latter tend not to have the offset knotting often seen in Northern Kurdistan weavings.



80



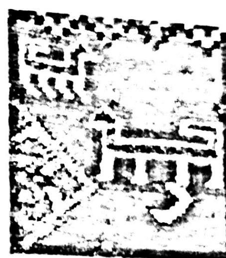
a

Memling Gul
West central Caucasus
first quarter of the 19th century
6'0" x 6'10" (185 x 210 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

This rug resembles in design the so-called "Kazak" or "Moghan" that rug writers ascribe to the weavings of Azeris who live in the Caucasus (see Burns, 1987, pl. 30, for an "Azeri" version of this rug design). When we look at these rugs, we usually identify them as Kazak or Moghan because writers, dealers, collectors, and auction houses have universally called them that. Actually "Kazak" is Turkic for "warrior-raider" and there is no tribe, clan, or place in the Caucasus with such a name, although it has been applied to many different groups of nomads in Turkey and the Caucasus. This rug has typical Kurdish construction with brown wool and weft with two weft shoots between each row of knots, has the Kurdish palette of colors, and has the Kurdish penchant for the whimsical use of zigzag designs. The "Memling *guls*" in the field contain the diamond and hooked motif, ascribed to the Herki-Shanbo ( ), which is used extensively by the Kurds of Northern Kurdistan (see "The Identification of Kurdish Weaving"). Kurds have resided in the Caucasus for thousands of years. It is likely that this design motif was shared by various nomadic groups of Kurds as well as non-Kurds living in the Caucasus. The rosette border on this rug resembles the rosette border on the Assyrian stone floor "rug" illustrated on page 155. The main border of squares with gold, green, red, white, and salmon colors dissected by a hooked device is a border seen in a particular variant of the star Kazaks (see *Hali*, 1, 4, 1978, p. 372, pl. VII) whose precise weaving origin has yet to be determined. There are many fascinating puzzles concerning tribal rugs that await further study.



81


a

Five Medallions
West central Caucasus
mid-19th century
4'8"x 7'4" (142 x 224 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Five large hooked medallions ascend the field, flanked by smaller hooked octagons and a number of tiny ornaments and animals (a). Tree-like forms extend from the upper and lower sides of the central medallions, giving the impression of birds facing trees. An inner border of multicolored octagons on yellow is enclosed by an outer border with a repeating design of multicolored hooked diamonds on ivory, which is flanked by narrow reciprocal trefoil borders of blue and black. Woven by Kurds in the west central Caucasus, this rug has a palette quite distinct from those seen in weavings produced by Georgians, Armenians, and Azeris. Shades of yellow, mauve, bright blue, gold, green, and pink, with a bluish-red for the ground (perhaps indicating use of an insect dye rather than madder), distinguish the work of the Kurds.



Square on Plain Field
Zakatali area, west central Caucasus
mid-19th century
3'3" x 5'7" (100 x 172 cm)
goat hair pile on a wool and goat hair foundation

Rugs of this kind, principally made of goat hair, have only become known to a wide audience in the West within the last fifteen years or so, and are called *tulu*. Many nomadic groups in Turkey produce these pieces. The minimalist design gives this simple yet powerful textile a timeless quality, and one can speculate that such rugs represent a tradition unchanged through hundreds of weaving generations. This example was purchased recently from a Kurdish family from the Aragat Mountains bordering the town of Zakatella (formerly Zakatali) in the northwestern Caucasus, where Kurds have lived for centuries.

N

Western Kurdistan






OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Caruh
Kelkit
Siran
Bayburt
Bayburt
Narman
Kelkit
Sivas
Halys
Kochhizer
Zara (Kochgiri)
Imrenia
to Tabriz
Erzurum
Jelali
Kochgiri
Kurchnis (Refehiye)
Erzinjan
Karasu
Araxes
to Ankara & the Mediterranean
Firat
Kangal
Divrigi
DOZHIK PRINCIPALITY
Janbegi-Derejan
Chielebi
Arapkir
Khozat
Kigl
Dersim-Shavak
Khinis
Yenice
Gamgam
Seriz
Sinan Dagi Mts.
Tahir
Jabaljur (Bingol)
Kharput (Elazig)
Murat
Sinan-Malatya
Mush
ROZHAKI
Afshin
Elbistan
Malatya
Euphrates
Lije
Kazandrin
Chemik
Bitlis
Jeyhan
Bey Dagi Mts.
Perveri
Diyarbakir
Silvan
Mar'ash
Nurhag
Kakhta
Siverek
KHALIDI
Mar'ash
Beshni
Adiyaman
Adiyaman
Diyarbakir
Siverek
Bismil
Redvan
Sa'ird (Siirt)
Bazarchik
Tigris
Hasankeyf
Osmania (Islahiye)
Aynt'ab (Antep)
Urfa
MILAN KHANATE
Veranshehr
Mardin
BOKHTI PRINCIPALITY
Jazira (Cesire)
Aynt'ab
Birjik
Mardin
Jazira
Jumi
Kilis
Amuda
Nisibin
Euphrates
Harran
Afrin
Bayas
KHEDIVATE OF EGYPT
Aleppo
Khabur
TASINI KHANATE

above **Map of the main weaving areas of Western Kurdistan, circa 1835.**

0 30 miles
50 kilometers

weaving area

area with Kurdish majority (approximate)

major commercial route

international border



Western Kurdistan can be divided geographically into three main parts: the balmy Mediterranean "far west" sector, centered on Mar'ash; the cold, mountainous Dersim region in the north, centered on Khozat; and the main sector, Upper Jazira (northern Mesopotamia), which is centered on Diyarbakir. About ninety percent of Western Kurdistan is now in Turkey; the rest is in Syria.[54]

Western Kurdistan has a long history of producing fine weavings. Marco Polo wrote of the area in the eastern part between Mush, Mardin, and Mosul as the locality where "cotton is produced in great abundance, of which they prepare the cloths called *boccasini*, and many other fabrics."[55] On the northwestern corner of Western Kurdistan, Marco Polo relates of the markets of Sivas (Sebastia) that "The best and handsomest carpets in the world are brought here, and also silks of crimson and other rich colors."[56] In the eighteenth century the famous Danish traveler and archaeologist Karstens Niebuhr, describing this same section of Western Kurdistan, spoke of its manufacture of flax and cotton, and a "species of silk called *kas* or *kes*, which grows on trees."[57] This silk survives today as *kushak*, a large scarf-like length of silk wrapped around the waists of maidens, particularly at their weddings.

In the areas of Jazira and Mardin, good long-strand cotton has been continuously available from the time of Marco Polo to this day. This cotton continued to provide for the foundation material for the wool pile rugs as well as for fine weaves and crochets in the area of Western Kurdistan. The silk industry noted by Niebuhr in the eighteenth century had virtually disappeared from Western Kurdistan by 1835.

Far West sector

The Far West sub-sector of Western Kurdistan extends from the west bank of the Euphrates River to the east of Adana. Historically it comprised the ancient and classical Kurdish territories of Commagene and Cappadocia Magna, with portions of eastern Cilicia also an integral part of this subdivision. This is also the only sector of continuous Kurdistan that touches on the open seas. Bayas (Payas) on the Gulf of Alexandretta in the Mediterranean is the only port city in otherwise landlocked and mountainous Kurdistan. The Kurdish clan of Janpulat has inhabited the coastal territories in the environs of Bayas since at least medieval times. The entire length of this subdivision is traversed by the northeast–southwest stretch of the Amanus Mountains, which begin at the confluence of the Euphrates and Murat rivers and end in Syria. The mountains drop in elevation from northeast to southwest. This sector of Western Kurdistan is enriched by much forest and pastureland, with Mediterranean plant and animal products being the staples of the local agriculture.

The area is rather densely populated and has a number of large cities of great antiquity. Its impressive number of archeological ruins reflects a long and distinguished tradition of urban settlement. Major cities of the subdivision include Malatya, Adiyaman, Aynt'ab (Antep/Gaziantep), Osmania (Islahiye), Afrin, and Mar'ash (Maras/Kahramanmaras). The spoken dialect is almost exclusively North Kurmanji. Sunni Islam is the religion of the majority, although there is also a sizable Alevi minority (approximately thirty-five percent of the population). The capital of this subdivision is the city of Malatya, which has a history that stretches over three millennia. The

right **A young Kurdish woman at Gotni, near Mush, Western Kurdistan, in 1893.**



city is first recorded as Melidi and was noted in the archives of the Akkadians, the Babylonians, and the Assyrians as being the main commercial entrepot for the whole of Anatolia. The Kurds generally did not live in the cities but in the areas surrounding them.

Far West sector: Malatya–Mar'ash area

The nomads living in the mountainous areas near Malatya and Mar'ash weave charming, whimsical carpets. The designs are generally asymmetric, capricious, and full of woven amulets and good luck symbols, and the rugs are sometimes misshapen. The rugs woven north of Malatya are sold in that city. The rugs woven to the south are marketed in Malatya or Urfa. The weavers of rugs and kilims from around Malatya and Mar'ash often employ kermes (a crimson color obtained by crushing an insect that lives in the bark of trees) in their work.

Far West sector: Aynt'ab

The Aynt'ab area in southern Turkey near the Syrian border has produced fine rugs for centuries. Eagleton relates that in the course of the twentieth century the use of natural dyes in rug and kilim production in Aynt'ab virtually disappeared.[58] Antique Aynt'ab pile rugs are readily recognizable by their consistent use of purple, aubergine, and a distinct apricot color; by their utilization of large medallion designs; and by small diamonds containing hooked devices (see plate 86).

Northwest sector

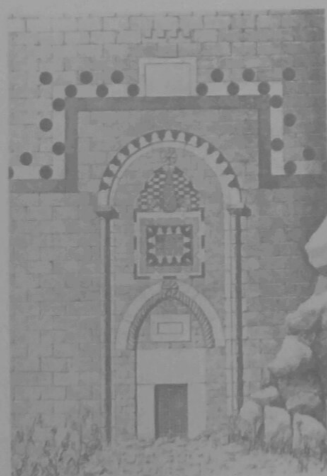
The northwest sector of western Kurdistan is largely the old Dersim region between the Murat and the Euphrates rivers. First noted as Drexene and later as Derzene by Greco-Roman historians, Dersim remains culturally one of the most exotic sectors of all Kurdistan. The weather alternates between harsh winters and mild summers, with plenty of rain and snowfall to provide for rich agriculture, lush pasturelands, and abundant forests. The high Munzur range forms the backbone of this region, stretching from east to west along the southern banks of the Euphrates, with peaks topping 11,000 feet (3,300 meters).

The Dimili (Zaza) dialect is spoken by the majority, and Alevism, a branch of the Yazdani religion, vastly outweighs Sunni Islam as the religion of the inhabitants. Jabaljur (Bingol), Kharput (Elazig), Divrigi, and Erzinjan are the urban areas of this subdivision. Divrigi, the modern name of Byzantine Tephrike, is directly north of Malatya. Historically it was the first area outside the Holy Land to convert to Christianity: a Cappadocian regiment of Roman soldiers numbering five thousand converted in 125–150 AD. The weavers frequently borrowed weaving designs from ancient rock carvings found in the area (see plate 89).

East of Sivas is a Kurdish population living in and around the city of Zara (Kochgiri). While this pocket of Kurds is not technically part of the northwest sector of Western Kurdistan, it is included here because of its geographical proximity. Their weaving is distinguished by a distinctive rose color and a dusty aubergine which they often employ (see plate 90).

Upper Jazira sector

The main part of this subdivision includes all of western Kurdistan from the Tigris to the Euphrates rivers. Historically



left **Geometric design above the gate of Mahmoudieh, Western Kurdistan.**



above **Mountain landscape between Van and Diyarbakir, Western Kurdistan.**

it has been known as the Upper Jazira (Cizre in Turkish), which is derived from a Semitic term meaning "island" – the area is bounded on almost all sides by the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers with their tributaries. The culture of this sector is largely Mediterranean in outlook. Geographically it ranges from the lowlands of Urfa and Mardin to mountain elevations of over 10,000 feet (3,000 meters). The climate is mild throughout; agriculture is bountiful, and woodlands stand in scattered patches. Historically the region has been urban-centered: its many large cities, including Jazira, Mardin, Sa'ird, Silvan, Siverek, and Urfa, have always been populous and worldly, looking toward the West and the Mediterranean for inspiration. The city of Diyarbakir is the seat of this subdivision.

Despite its long border with Northern Kurdistan the region is effectively isolated from its neighbor, and in fact from all the rest of Kurdistan. This is due largely to the desolate and rugged character of Northern Kurdistan. The inhabitants of this region are primarily Sunni Muslims, although a large Alevi and much smaller Yezidi and Christian minorities are also found. Linguistically, the Sunni majority is North Kumanji speaking, while Dimili is the primary language of the people living in the northwest, bordering on Dersim. The Christian population speaks, in addition to Kurmanji, various dialects of Neo-Aramaic such as Assyrian and Chaldean. Armenian is the vernacular of a tiny minority that is just a ghost of the once-large Armenian community in the area.

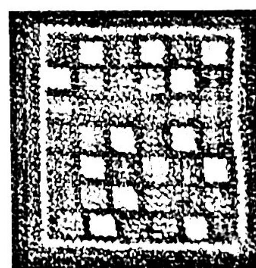


Hooked Medallions on Red

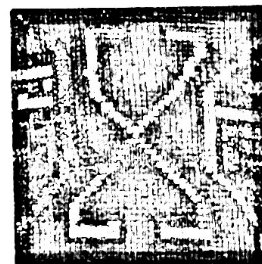
Malatya,
Western Kurdistan
circa 1800
5′11″x 8′11″(180 x 272 cm)
kilim, tapestry weave
in wool

The use of a palette of predominantly blue, red, and ivory is characteristic of flatweaves from Malatya in Western Kurdistan, and the design of large hooked diamonds containing smaller hooked diamonds is also typical. Within the smaller diamonds are pairs of confronting figures composed of four triangles, one used as the figure's "head," two flanking it, and a fourth beneath it. This kilim has an archaic appearance in terms of its design and motifs. An unusual use of "negative" space in the center causes the four red "fields" to take on the forms of polygonal medallions overlaid on to a mosaic ground. Later kilims from the same area have more crowded designs and often employ a kermes color, the distinctive bluish-red insect dye not usually used in early Malatya weavings.





a

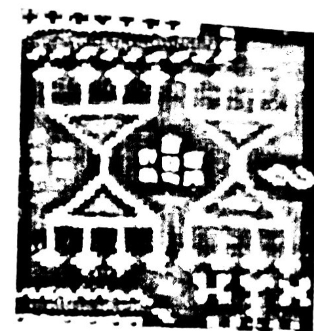


b

Octagons and Squares
Arapkir, north of Malatya,
Western Kurdistan
first quarter of the
19th century
3'3"x 6'0" (99 x 183 cm)
wool pile on a wool
foundation

This rug displays a typically nomadic "free and easy" approach to the overall design, to the individual weaving elements, and to the weaving itself. It was probably made on a primitively constructed ground loom and would have been misshapen even when new due to uneven warp tension during weaving. It was made by the Arapkir, a now-settled Kurdish group living in the mountainous region north of Malatya who were nomadic until fairly recent times. The small squares with checkerboard interiors (a) represent a chess-like game played by children with colored stones. The yellow device seen in complete form between the pair of octagons at the base of the field and which resembles a pair of ice-tongs (b) is a version of the *muska* or good luck talisman. The palette – with dark colors predominating and with light and dark blue, brown, ivory, and yellow as the principal colors for the motifs – is the usual one for Arapkir weavings. The lack of symmetry in such rugs seems charming, almost whimsical, to Western eyes, and is typical both of Arapkir work specifically and of tribal weaving in general. It is a characteristic that Western collectors, who have come to value tribal weavings highly over the last three or four decades, find most endearing.




a

85

Geometric Flowers in Medallions

Near Aynt'ab,
Western Kurdistan
first quarter of the 19th century
4'4"x 7'5"(132 x 226 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Three polygonal medallions, two with red grounds and the central one with blue, dominate the field. Within each medallion are four large and highly stylized, abstract floral palmettes of zoomorphic appearance surrounding a small white-ground central polygon perhaps representing a Yazdani-inspired abyss. This may be a "garden" carpet in which the design has reached a stage of almost complete abstraction, with its origin probably unknown to the weaver. The comb-like *muska* good-luck ornament (a) is seen here in double form, with two above and two below the central medallion. The combination of tones of purple, aubergine, apricot, and salmon pink is characteristic of weavings such as this attributed to the Kurds living between Aynt'ab and Adıyaman in southern Turkey, near the Syrian border.





a



b

Large Medallion Fragment
Aynt'ab,
Western Kurdistan
circa 1800
3'6"x 5'2"(108 x 159 cm)
incomplete, wool pile on a wool foundation

A large red-ground star-like medallion fills the center of the field, and white-ground rectangular panels are placed in each corner. This composition is most typically found on the so-called "Holbein" rugs of Anatolia. Rugs with such patterns can be seen depicted in Western paintings from the fifteenth century, and several "classical" versions survive. A similar design scheme can also be seen in the so-called "Karachof" Kazak rugs of the Caucasus. The Aynt'ab region is suggested as the likely origin of this rug partly because of its lustrous apricot and red colors, which are typical of weavings from this area.

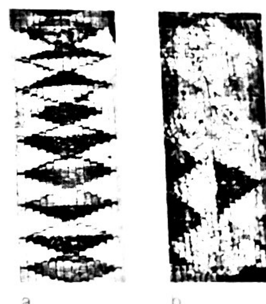
In addition, according to William Eagleton (1988, p. 132), the small diamonds with hooked devices that are scattered through the field (a) are typically used by the weavers of this area. The central medallion is similar to the medallions in plate 85 (b), and may also represent the classical abyss motif.



Bird's Head Diamond Medallions
Bey Dagi Mountains, south of Malatya, Western Kurdistan
circa 1800
2'7" x 5'8" (79 x 173 cm)
incomplete, wool pile on a wool foundation

This nomadic tribal rug – now missing its ends and part of its sides – has an attractive juxtaposition of rectangular "blocks" in red, light blue, dark brown, pale gold brown, and ivory. The almost random arrangement of different color fields adds to its great charm. Within each "block" (except at the base of the field, where the motifs become simplified) is a large quartered diamond with "bird's head" latch-hooked extensions. In the top half of the field, each "block" on the right has a half diamond at the left side, and vice versa for the left-hand "blocks." These meet in the center to form a "pole" of diamonds with either quartered or halved interiors. The rug has a heavy, chunky pile and an all-wool foundation, making it suitable protection against the intense cold of this mountain region.





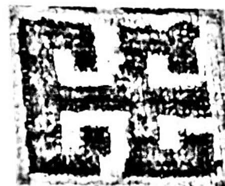
a b

Columns of Diamonds and Checkerboard
Sinan, Western Kurdistan
circa 1800
3'11" x 5'0" (119 x 152 cm)
incomplete, wool pile on a wool foundation

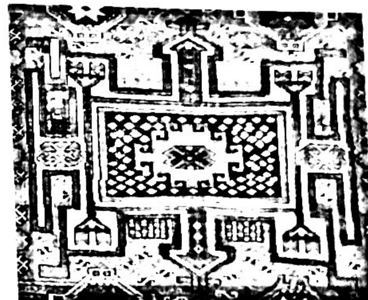
The checkerboard bands of the field of this fascinating carpet and the simple zigzag pattern in the ivory border represent tribal art at its best. The two (and a bit) vertical ivory columns in the field both contain a conjoined diamond "pole" with halved interiors (a) reminiscent of the rug in plate 87 (b).

The soft coloring of this rug is distinctive, however, and the rug can be attributed to the Sinan Kurds, a nomadic group whose summer pasture is on the slopes of Sinan Dagi (Sinan Mountain) in the Eastern Taurus range of southern Turkey, and who market their weavings in Malatya and Urfa. As it is relatively simple in the making of a rug to knot colors to create vertical lines, the breaking of the vertical lines of the columns of diamonds in the field and the insertion of randomly placed motifs would appear to have been a deliberately contrived effect. While the original width of this carpet is clear, it is impossible to determine its original length.





b



a

89

Alternating Green and Blue Medallions

Divrigi, Western Kurdistan
circa 1800
3'7" x 6'11" (110 x 213 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The particular palette seen in this rug, with alternating green and blue medallions on a rusty red ground, is a typical color combination employed by weavers throughout Kurdistan. The design of the medallions resembles the abyss variant medallions found on the rugs of Darreh Gaz, such as plate 99 (a). A large group of Alevi Kurds, who traditionally employ the abyss design, live in the Divigri area directly north of Malatya.

The border contains "double swastika" motifs (b), an ancient device carved on rock walls in central Anatolia and frequently used by weavers from various ethnic groups in Western Kurdistan.







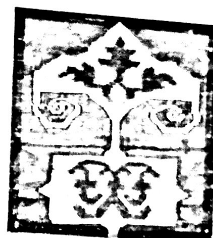
a

90

Re-entry Motif
Zara, east of Sivas,
Western Kurdistan
circa 1700
4'0"x 8'3" (122 x 251 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The principal motif here is the open rectangle in the field outlined by a continuous blue "bar" with two inward-pointing octagonal "arches" at either end. This is commonly called the "re-entry" motif in carpet literature and is found on both urban rugs (many of them from Ushak in Anatolia) and on examples such as this, which was made in a village or tribal environment. (A variant of the design has one "arch" pointing outward and the other inward). A number of Turkish rugs with closely related designs are known, dating from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries. A motif flanking the octagon at the upper end of the field resembles the Yarsani-inspired avatar symbols on the rug shown in plate 9 ( ) and may also have had a religious significance for the weaver. A variation on the "interlocking bird" pattern, seen on the rug in plate 70, is used for the main border here ( ). In the outer field between the blue "bar" and the inner narrow zigzag guard are rows of hanging diamond forms, which have a significance as amulets or good luck charms. These constitute almost a signature of Kurdish weaving. The predominant old rose color identifies the rug as being made by Kurds living around Zara (Kochgiri), east of Sivas. A related example was formerly in the McMullan collection (see McMullan, 1965, pl. 102).





a



b

91

Star Medallion and Pendants
Possibly Sivas area
late 16th or early 17th century
5'7"x 7'9" (170 x 235 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The design features of this beautiful rug, formerly with Heinrich Jacoby and now in the St. Louis Art Museum, are shared by only three other known examples. (There are, however, a few related rugs in the Vakiflar Museum in Istanbul which are possibly from neighboring villages; see Vakiflar, 1988, pls 25, 26.) A related rug was formerly in the Hermine Feist Collection, Berlin, and also has the offset knotting typical of Kurdish carpets from Eastern Anatolia in its field (see *Hali*, 73, February–March 1994, pp. 131–32). This type of rug is generally believed to have been woven in the Sivas area. The St. Louis and Feist rugs differ in only three ways: the Feist example has two medallions, is much larger, and its pattern appears to be more archaic.

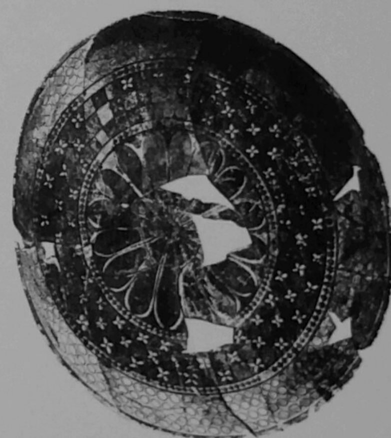
The medallions of both rugs are composed of split-leaf arabesques, with crenellated sides, and have cartouche and spade-like pendants (a) extending from each end. The fields are basically in two colors, with a fascinating design of archaic abstracted animal forms in red against a blue background. The primary borders feature animals against an ivory background (b) and are flanked by reciprocal trefoil borders. The classical nature of the medallion and the split-leaf arabesques in particular can be related to two possible sources: the medallions of carpets that may have come from Persia in the middle of the sixteenth century, such as the famous Ardebil carpet at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; and the medallions of two large and rare "Damascus"-type carpets in the Turkish and Islamic Art Museum in Istanbul (see Vakiflar, 1988, p. 128, fig. 58.2). The curvilinear aspects of the medallion seen here suggest an urban workshop, as this rug is definitely not a product of nomadic looms.





above Illustration showing part of a bas relief at Nymphaios, north of Adiyaman, depicting the Zelanid king Mithridates the Great. The eight-pointed star design can be seen on his clothing.

right Halaf pottery with star design around a central rosette.

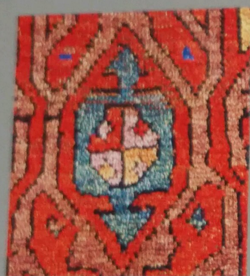


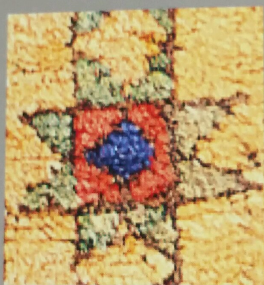
92

Halaf Pattern
Western Kurdistan
18th century or earlier
2'8" x 4'0" (82 x 123 cm)
incomplete, wool pile on a wool foundation

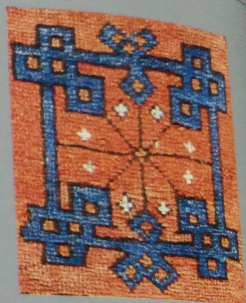
The central field is completely plain except for the slight variations in the brown/aubergine color. It gives the impression of a window framed by a simple but highly decorative wide frame of ivory stars in a diagonal grid against a red background. This unique weaving reflects a design feature of the ancient people called Halaf, who populated Upper Mesopotamia for a period of six hundred years around 6000 BC (see Appendix essay). The Halaf people produced high-quality pottery with painted decorations, and the border of this rug is similar to a border of a Halaf decorated bowl dated to 6000 BC (see illustration above). This grid-work of stars appears again in history, this time in textile form on the tunic of the Zelanid king Mithridates the Great, r. c. 115–63 BC, (see above). The Teshup-Zelan star found decorating a number of Kurdish rugs is considered to be derived from the Halaf. The construction of this antique rug favors Kurdish attribution, from Western or perhaps Central Kurdistan.

Central Anatolian Exclave



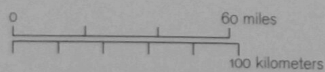






Black Sea
Samsun (Amisus)
Black Sea
Havza
Tosya
Ladiq
Merzifon
Karsunlu
Gerede
Changiri
Iskilib
Amasya
Chorum
Cankiri
Halys
Turhal
to Istanbul
Jemilbey
Zile
Tokat
Yesilirmak
Beypazari
Alaja
Chorum
Cheqireq
Sinjan
Ankara
Ankara
Yozgat
Qara Maghare
Sivas
Porsuk
Delia
to Tabriz
Qara Ali
Aqlaghmadani
Sakarya
Majidiye
Mantasha
Sivrihisar
Haymana
Oyaja
Golu
Sarkisla
Gunyuzu
Haymana
Guranchi
Halys
Jemshid
Qirshehir
Boghazliyan
Cheltik
Yamaq
Muzur
Sarioglan
Haji Bektash
Yunak
Sharafli
Pinarbasi
Kunik
Lake Tuz
Kayseri
Jihanbegli (Turgut)
Jihanbegli
Cihanbeyli
Yenice
Lake Akşehir
Hajib
Nevshehir
Eski'il
Tomarza
Aqsaray
Siverek (Altinekin)
Sultankandi
Niqda (Nigde)
Goksu
Lake Beysehir
Konya
Karsanti
Kazandrin
Mar'ash
Kozan
Karaman
Chatalan
Jeyhan
Karaman
Hakkibeyli
Osmania (Islahiye)
Adana
Tarsus
Seyhan
Kilis
Mediterranean Sea
Mediterranean Sea

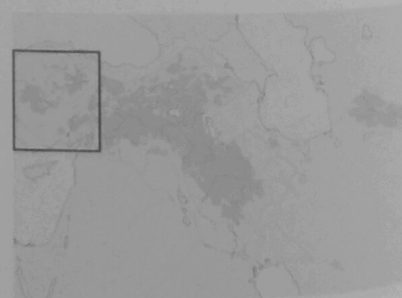
above Map of the Kurdish weaving areas in central Anatolia, circa 1835.



weaving area

area with Kurdish majority (approximate)

major commercial route



Cihanbeyli

About halfway between Konya and Ankara in central Anatolia are the Cihanbeyli (Jihanbegli) Kurds, who weave heavy rugs with designs reminiscent of eastern Anatolia. In the early sixteenth century, with the Ottomans at war with the Persians, the Ottoman sultan Selim II decided to move the Kurds and other minorities from the border land between Persia and Anatolia. He did not forcibly remove these Kurds from their ancestral land but rather enticed them by giving them land near Lake Tuz ("Salt" Lake), by the city of Jihanbegli (Turgut). Land grants were given to the Kurds with the provision that they did not have to pay taxes for ten years if they remained on this land. After these Kurds left the war zone, Selim's army destroyed their homes and crops so as to prevent any Persian feeding and living off the land in this border region.

Between 1600 and 1700 several thousand Kurds moved to central Anatolia, bringing their sheep to graze in the grasslands as well as their rug-producing skills and designs. Their rugs and kilims often feature confronting angled birds' heads in a diamond pattern, alongside other designs presumably similar to those that had been woven for centuries in their old homeland. The Cihanbeyli weavers currently use harder, coarser wool and dark-colored wefting, unlike that which their ancestors employed from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries.

Haymana

Just south of Ankara are the Haymana Kurds, who also moved from the east to central Anatolia. Their old pile weavings are identifiable because they use bright orange, bright green, bright yellow, and a distinct maroon color. Even after a hundred and fifty years of oxidation, the colors remain bright. I have seen very few of their pile rugs in the marketplace, but some kilims.

Yunak

The Yunak Kurds, another group of displaced east Anatolian Kurds, reside southwest of Ankara. They weave mostly *kenare* or runners with medium-heavy wool pile and construction. Their use of pumpkin, green, and mauve colors in their weavings helps identify their work. They occasionally employ a main border design that is similar to a border design used by the Khallikan clan that lived east of Lake Van, perhaps indicating that they are descendants of the Khallikan.

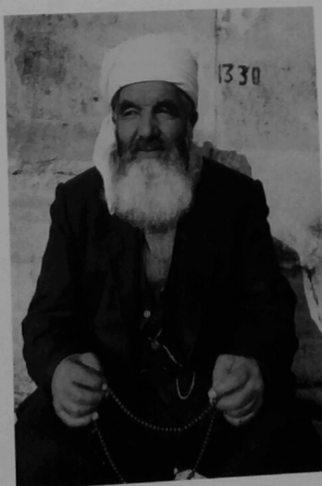
Karaman

The Kurds who inhabit the mountainous Karaman area east of Konya are usually called *yuruks* ("mountain people") by rug dealers and collectors. Their rugs are heavy, coarse, and constructed of durable brown wool for warp and weft with three or four wefts between each row of knots. The Karaman Kurds typically weave runner sizes with medallions that use blocks of blue and green and are often contrasted with a red-chocolate brown abrashed field. There is an unresolved question as to whether the weavers of these Karaman rugs were Kurdish or Turkoman or both. Turkomans founded the Anatolian dynasty of Karaman and have lived in the area for centuries.

Chorum and Changiri

Among the other groups of Kurds that were transplanted from eastern to central Anatolia in the sixteenth century were the Chorum and the Changiri. They reside northeast of Ankara and weave rugs and kilims, but no examples are included here.

right **Kurdish man from central Anatolia holding prayer beads.**





93



a



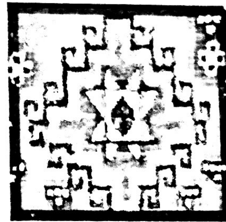
b

overleaf detail of plate 93

Three Medallions
Cihanbeyli, Central Anatolian Exclave
18th century
5'3" x 9'3" (160 x 282 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

Three medallions seem to float on a contrasting rich rust-red field. The wide border of spaciously arranged diamond-shaped quadrangles, in shades of aubergine, green, ivory, yellow, and blue, is quite unusual and a delight to the eye. The rug is constructed in the same way as the other piece from Cihanbeyli illustrated here (plate 94), with red wefting, a thick handle, long glossy wool, and a multiple cord selvedge overcast in a mixture of purple and red wool. The row of 'boxes' in the minor border at the bottom of this rug (a) is reminiscent of the outer borders of rugs woven in the Khurasani Exclave, such as plate 99 (b). The Khurasan Kurds, like the Cihanbeyli, were also relocated from Northern Kurdistan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.




a

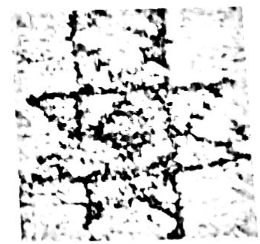
94

Three Hooked Medallions
Cihanbeyli, Central Anatolian Exclave
18th century
3′11″x 10′0″(119 x 305 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The diamond medallions with latch-hooks are characteristic of North Kurdistan, as seen in plate 77 (a), and illustrate how the designs moved with the weavers to central Anatolia.. The use of partial medallions at the side of the field creates a zigzag effect. This primitive-looking, thick-piled carpet, with its somewhat idiosyncratic designs in both field and borders, has the shades of bright contrasting green, pink, blue, mauve, and rich crimson which distinguish the rugs from this area. Both design and palette are typically Kurdish.




a

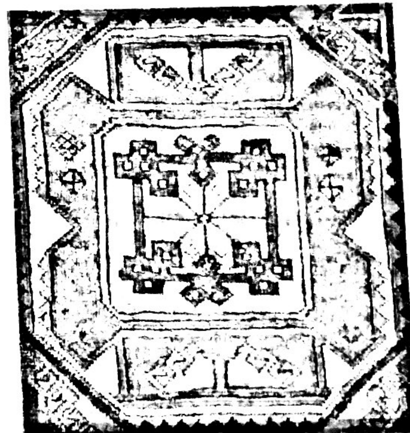

b

95

Diamond Medallions and Stars
Haymana, Central Anatolian Exclave
first half of the 19th century
4'5"x 6'10" (135 x 208 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The design of the central field is less ordered than that of the borders. At the lower end there are rows of ornaments and then eight-pointed stars (a), and as the pattern progresses up the field two irregular columns of large hooked diamonds replace some of the smaller ornaments. Along the sides of the field are more eight-pointed stars (b). The multiple borders and above all the distinctive palette of this rug are typical of nomadic weavings from the Haymana district of central Turkey, south of Ankara. Such weavings often display bright colors that would normally clash but which appear perfectly compatible on these rugs. The foundation of this rug is of natural undyed dark brown wool.




a

96

Medallions in Octogons
Yunak, Central Anatolian Exclave
first quarter of the 19th century
3′2″x 11′0″(97 x 335 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

This *kenare* (side carpet) has a distinctive and unusual palette of pumpkin and green. The field is filled with a column of large conjoined octagons. In the triangular spaces created between the octagons are half-diamond hooked medallions. Within each octagon is a large wheel-like motif with pairs of facing birds in the upper and lower sections (a), and inside this motif is an octagon with an interlaced knot. The border pattern of back-to-back "C" motifs is found in similar form on a Northern Kurdistan example, plate 69. This shared image could indicate a continuous design tradition among Yunak weavers who were transplanted to central Anatolia from eastern Anatolia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Natural undyed brown wool is used for the foundation.



97

Medallions and Pendants
Karaman, Central Anatolian Exclave
first half of the 19th century
4'0"x 11'0" (122 x 335 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The combination of colors – intense blue and green medallions and partial medallions at the sides and corners on an abrashed brown-red field – is characteristic of rugs woven by the Kurds of Karaman, in the southern part of central Anatolia. This example also has the typical deep-piled, heavy, coarse wool and runner-like format.

Khurasani Exclave









TURKOMAN COUNTRY

Kara Kum Sand Desert

Sumbar

Kopet Mountains

Ashkhabad (Ashgabat)

Firuza

Oghaz

Jelali

Kikanlu

Qarachorlu

Samalqan

Atrak

Darreh Gaz

Heri

Bojnurd

Shirvan

to Asterabad (Gurgan) and Tehran

Za'faranlu

Shadlu

Gunbadi Qabus (Jurjan)

Elburz Mountains

Isfara'in

Qochan

La'in

Kalat

Kowanlu

Revand Mountains

Maliwanlu

Radkan

Topkanlu

to Tehran

Sarakhs

Pasa Kuh Steppe

Bastam

to Bukhara

Meshad

Nishapor

Kashaf

Sabzavar (Bayhaq)

PERSIAN EMPIRE

Great Kavir Salt Desert

above **Map of the Kurdish weaving areas in Khurasan, circa 1835.**

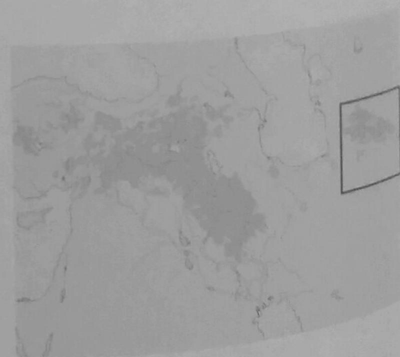


weaving area

area with Kurdish majority (approximate)

major commercial route

international border



The two parallel ridges of the Revand act as ramparts to a long fertile valley within which the three main cities – Qochan, Shirvan, and Bojnurd – lie approximately equidistant from each another. The Atrak River runs almost the entire length of the valley, from the southeast to the northwest, before emptying into the Caspian Sea. The smaller Kashaf River drains the southeastern quarter of the valley, running the exact opposite course of the Atrak before disappearing into the sands of the Kara Kum desert of Turkmenistan in Central Asia. Thick Caspian forests cover the western third of the exclave, becoming grassland toward the east. The northern slopes facing the parched Kara Kum desert support some grass but are primarily open stands of tamarisk trees and bushes. The area is naturally rich in trees that harbor cochineal-producing insects, producing copious amounts of that crimson dye for local use as well as for export.

The summers generally vary from pleasant in the mountainous areas to hot in and around the great Kara Kum sand desert to the north and the Kavir salt desert to the south. Winters, however, are brutal: the cold Siberian air mass descends on the region like a frigid dome, causing temperatures to drop as low as minus 40°F (-40°C). Heavy furs (especially Persian lamb coats and hats), heavy woolen clothing, and thick durable rugs are thus necessities in this area. In the past as in the present, many of these warm items were produced both for local use and for export: they were marketed in the local bazaars of Qochan, Shirvan, and Bojnurd as well as in the great exporting Persian emporium of Meshad.

The important city of Meshad, long the capital of Persian Khurasan, is on the immediate eastern fringes of the Kurdish exclave. To the west lies the city of Asterabad (modern Gurgan), the largest city and emporium in the Persian province of Mazanderan. Asterabad was an exporting center for goods going to Russia and beyond via the Caspian Sea, while Meshad was one of the major cities on the old Silk Road. Thus the Kurdish exclave had easy access to extensive markets, both for exporting its own goods and for importing any technology or products it needed. There are also many other ancient towns and cities dotting the Revand Heights and its piedmont. The modern Turkoman capital of Ashkhabad (Ashgabat), for example, is located on the northern slopes of the Revand, with its southern suburbs in the Kurdish territories.

The main trunk of the Silk Road crossed the southern slopes of the Revand, passing through Meshad on its way to Tehran and beyond.[60] A secondary trunk line ran northwest from Meshad through the major Kurdish cities of Qochan, Shirvan, and Bojnurd. This northern route passed through the heartland of the Khurasani Kurdish Exclave, but was always less important than the southern route due to predation by Turkoman raiders from the thirteenth century onward. Significant commerce nonetheless took place along the secondary line: the Kurds sold passing merchants such commodities as dried foodstuff (raisins, almonds, apricots, and peaches), cereals, raw wool, dyestuff (cochineal), and precious or semiprecious stones (turquoise and carnelian). Both the Kurds and the indigenous Persian population also sold finished woolens, cotton goods, rugs, kilims, and various other textiles.

The Khurasani exclave is not a "native" Kurdish territory, at least not by Middle Eastern standards in which the criterion for

right **Villagers in Khurasan province in 1910.**



"nativeness" is measured in millennia, not centuries. The area was the very heartland of ancient Parthia – today Parthian ruins are numerous – but by the fifth century AD it had been completely absorbed into Persia. The Turko–Mongolian nomadic influx, which began as a trickle in the sixth century, turned into a destructive flood with the arrival of Genghiz Khan's Mongol armies in the thirteenth century. As a result, when the present Kurdish population began to arrive in the early sixteenth century, this most fertile land in southwestern Asia was largely depopulated, its formerly prosperous urban/agricultural base destroyed by the Mongols. The major influx of Kurds occurred in the late sixteenth century when they were deported en masse from Northern Kurdistan by the Safavid kings of Persia, who forced them into exile into northern Khurasan and beyond. These arrivals did not cease until well into the eighteenth century.

The primary Kurdish tribal confederacies in the region were (and remain today) the same as the original fief divisions under the Safavids. The most important was and is the Za'faranlu, headed by the house of Chemishkazag, whose last capital at Qochan remains the largest city and market in the exclave. The Za'faranlu confederacy has always controlled the largest area and contained the most member tribes, clans, and households. They wove rugs and flatweaves, but their name was seldom attached to their products; instead, these were generally named after the towns in which they were marketed, such as Qochan, Shirvan, Darreh Gaz, or Meshad. (The Topkanlu were technically a member of the Za'faranlu confederacy, but their weaving style resembled that of the Baluchi.) Rarely have the Za'faranlu lost the political and military leadership of the Khurasani Kurds. They also distinguished themselves through their military service to the Persian court, defending Persia's northeastern imperial borders against incursions by Central Asiatic powers. It was the Za'faranlu generals and their Kurdish contingency that played a major role in the conquest of Mughal India for the Persian monarch Nadir Shah in 1738.[61] The Karamanlu and the Kowanlu have been eclipsed, becoming a constituent part (albeit a very large one) of the Za'faranlu. In 1835 the Za'faranlu territory stretched from the western environs of Meshad to halfway between the towns of Shirvan and Bojnurd.

The Shadlu were second in importance; their capital was at Bojnurd (the medieval Persian city of Buzanjird).

The Qarachorlu held the westernmost territory of the Khurasani Kurdish Exclave, and were the most exposed to the Turkoman raiders. The town of Samalqan served as their headquarters. There were also several smaller confederacies at the time, including the Jelali, whose territory was the northern hill country facing the great Kara Kum desert in Central Asia.

The Kurds who arrived in Khurasan were largely from the parts of Northern Kurdistan that are now in southeastern Turkey, and even today, centuries later, they speak various dialects of the North Kurmanji language which still predominates among the Turkish Kurds.[62] The costumes and customs of Khurasani Kurds, although they resemble those of the Kurds in Turkey more closely than they do those of other Kurds, actually have greater affinity with those of southeastern Europeans. The women's high-heeled shoes and knee-high skirts – worn in



right **A group of Kurds in national costume, Khurasani exclave, 1910.**

layers and fitted with white aprons – remind one of Ukrainian or Romanian costumes more than Kurdish or even Middle Eastern clothing. There can be little doubt that this was the fashion that Kurds wore in Anatolia four hundred years ago, as no other groups in Khurasan wear anything remotely resembling this costume. The tenacity with which the Khurasani Kurds have maintained their antique language, customs, and costumes strongly suggests an equal tenacity in preserving their weaving traditions: we can assume that we are seeing rug weaving techniques and designs brought down from antiquity.

Vintage photographs are now all that remain of the sumptuous palaces and mansions of the old Kurdish principalities of Khurasan. Up until 1831, all the territory of northern Khurasan was officially included within the Persian Empire, but the writ of the government in Tehran was barely read in the area. The Kurdish and Turkoman nomadic tribes held undisputed sway over their territories, paying no practical homage to the Persian crown. The same was true of the old, settled Kurdish principalities in the area, whose power was soon to be violently ended by the Persian army. In the first half of the nineteenth century the common pattern for subduing Kurdish principalities and bastions, whether in Turkey or Persia, became first to hire the services of European army engineers (English in the case of Persia, German in the case of the Ottomans), and then to use artillery to bombard the Kurdish cities into submission.

During the formative years of Persia's Qajar dynasty, the government in Tehran tried hard either to bring local Khurasani emirs and princes under the vassalage of Persia, or preferably to assimilate them completely. In 1831, the Persian crown prince Abbas Mirza, having finished two drawn-out wars with the Russian Empire over the Caucasus, brought the full force of his war-hardened army and lethal artillery upon the Khurasani Kurds. When the Kurdish prince refused to submit, his capital of Qochan was besieged and he surrendered.

The loss of autonomy led to a slow but steady decrease in the ability of the Chemishkazag emirs to protect their territory from frequent incursions by the raiding Turkoman nomads gathering slaves and booty. As the economic conditions deteriorated, so did the quality of the rugs produced in the region. The British diplomat and traveler Alexander Burnes arrived in Qochan in 1832 and reported that most of the countryside had been abandoned, the peasants having taken refuge in Qochan, a city of forty thousand inhabitants. The final *coup de grâce* to the emirate came in the series of devastating earthquakes that occurred in 1873, in 1894, and particularly in 1895. Most of the city's inhabitants died as a result of the 1895 'quake: the population was reduced to eight thousand. The devastation was so thorough that the old city had to be abandoned altogether and a new Qochan was built 7 miles (11 kilometers) to the east.

In 1847 the khanate of Bojnurd went through the same harrowing experiences as the emirate of Qochan, coming under siege and bombardment followed by surrender as the Qajar proceeded with centralization of their imperial territories. This surrender ended the autonomy and prosperity of that Kurdish khanate as well.

These adverse factors – the Kurds' loss of freedom, their loss of the ability to defend themselves and their possessions from the

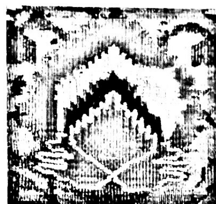
nomadic Turkoman raiders, their loss of economic prosperity, and loss of traditional grazing grounds (due to the creation of impenetrable international boundaries which were closed to the nomads and their herds) – combined with the region's destructive wars and earthquakes, served to compromise the Kurds' weaving ability, leading to a decrease in weaving production and quality.

Several weaving provinces can be recognized in Khurasan, all of which are named after the major market town where they were presented for sale. Qochan, Shirvan, and Bojnurd all have recognizable styles of weaving.

In my hunt for great old Kurdish weavings from Khurasan I have been disappointed. There are many pieces on the market from the period 1880–1910, but to my eye the thickness of their pile causes their designs to be ill defined, and they do not have the old vivid colors. A large number of antique Khurasani Kurd rugs reportedly can be found in the shrine collection in Meshad, but it is difficult, even for Muslims, to be granted access. Few of the old pieces appear to be in other collections or in museums. Further studies of this group should probably focus on the Meshad shrine's collection. The rugs called Darreh Gaz marketed in Qochan resemble rugs from Northern Kurdistan: they have a similar palette and ribbon borders, latch-hook diamonds, multicolored amulet boxes, and large hooked figures. The few I have examined have tan wool warps, wool wefts dyed red, and symmetrical knotting. Carpets with design elements resembling the Ersari *gul*, but with brilliant yellows, greens, blues, and reds on a navy blue ground, were woven in the western area of the Khurasani Exclave (see plate 100).




c


a


b

overleaf detail of plate 98

98

Rows of Flame Palmettes
Darreh Gaz,
Khurasani Exclave
mid-19th century
5'5"x 11'8" (165 x 356 cm)
wool pile on a wool foundation

The diagonal rows of "flaming palmettes" in the field of this rug can be related to the similar elements found in differing form on plates 47 (a) and 57 (b). Wilfred Stanzer (1988, opposite p. 86) illustrates a rug with similar field motifs, which probably represent flowering trees. The panels at each end of the field contain three large bird- or animal-like creatures filled with ornaments, flowers, and animals. The inner yellow-ground and outer red-ground guards, with their continuous zigzag or "ribbon meander" pattern, can be seen on a number of rugs in this collection, sometimes in minor and sometimes in major borders (for example, see plates 88, and 90). This pattern is frequently found on rugs from Darreh Gaz. The central border of this rug has a series of animal and totemic motifs. The conjunction of colors and motifs – together with a structure which invariably consists of an all-wool foundation with three shoots of red wefts between each row of knots – clearly indicates an origin within this area of the Khurasani Exclave. If one turns this plate upside-down, the "flame palmettes" seem to resemble a double eagle motif (c).



99

Rectangular Medallions
Darreh Gaz,
Khurasani Exclave
mid-19th century
4'7"x 8'8"(140 x 264 cm),
reduced in width and length, wool pile on a wool foundation

Rugs from the Darreh Gaz region often have a field design consisting of large rectangular medallions with offshooting appendages. A.D. Francis (1983, p. 25) believes these rectangular medallions represent a garden, while Wilfred Stanzer (1988, p. 80) relates that the Kurds refer to these medallions as the *hauzi* ("water tank") design, which may be a rendition of the abyss motif employed by the followers of the Yazdani religion. The hooked device in the centre of the middle medallion resembles the design in a Cihanbeyli rug (plate 94) and in a Northern Kurdistan piece (plate 77). The present rug, reduced in length by about 2 feet at the base and missing its main borders, has a similar palette – particularly the aubergine and purple – to that of the old Kurdish rugs from Northern Kurdistan. The border design of a series of small "boxes" joined by a continuous straight line is typical of Darreh Gaz. As with most of the Kurdish rugs from Khurasan that I have examined, this example has red wefts.



Octagons and Diamonds
Probably Oghaz,
Khurasani Exclave
circa 1800
5′2″x 9′3″(157 x 282 cm)
wool pile on wool and goat hair warps and wool wefts

This rug has large octagonal medallions similar to those on rugs woven by the Turkoman tribes to the north of Khurasan. The medallions, called the *tauk noska gul* ("birds' heads" design), seem to float on a deeply saturated, lustrous indigo-dyed wool field. A blue field is a favorite for Kurdish weavers, while Turkoman weavers generally employ shades of red for the field color of their rugs. The subsidiary *guls* between the medallions resemble motifs found on Northern Kurdistan weavings. This piece was probably woven near the Oghaz area on the border with Turkmenistan, just south of Ashkhabad. It has the red wool wefts common to Kurdish rugs from the Khurasani Exclave.

Who are the Kurds? This is a question that often anticipates another: Where do the Kurds come from? If a terse answer would suffice one might say that the Kurds are the end product of numerous layers of cultural and genetic material superimposed via thousands of years of immigrations, internal migrations, and technological–cultural innovations and imports. But for a more detailed reponse we would need to study individually as many layers of these human movements and cultural influences as possible, going as far back in time as possible. To achieve this it is necessary to delve deep into antiquity, and to touch on notions as diverse as anthropology, linguistics, genetics, theology, economics, and demography, not to mention simple old narrative history.

Within the totality that we now distinguish as Kurdish cultural identity, at least five distinct "layers" can be identified with certainty. Beginning in around 6000 BC, these distinct layers can be identified as the Halaf, the Ubaid, the Hurrian, and the Aryan cultural periods, and the Semitic and Turkic periods.

Halaf cultural period

The earliest evidence thus far of a unified and distinct culture shared by the people inhabiting the Kurdish mountains relates to the period of the "Halaf culture" that began around eight thousand years ago. Named after the ancient mound of Tell Halaf west of the town of Qamishli in what is now Syrian Kurdistan, this culture is best known for its easily recognizable style of pottery, which was fortunately produced in abundance. Exquisitely painted and delicately designed, Halaf pottery is easily distinguishable from earlier and later productions. Judging from the pottery remains, Halaf culture appears to have flourished between 6000 and 5300 BC.

As most archeologists would testify, identifying a shared pottery style is a simple but crucial tool in helping to classify prehistoric cultures. Yet, while a shared pottery style can imply a shared culture, it can no more imply shared ethnicity for the people who produced them than shared rug designs can do now. Today, for example, the Turkic Qashqa'i, the Luric Mamasani, and the Arab Baseri peoples of southern Iran all share similar rug designs. In ethnographic and linguistic terms, however, these peoples have very little in common. This fact should serve as a clear warning to those who would use shared artistic styles as an indication of shared ethnicity. Pottery styles must be taken in tandem with other evidence in order to make a case for shared culture and ethnicity.

Halafian excavation sites from a widespread area have much more in common with each other than styles of pottery, however. Solid evidence has emerged to indicate striking similarities in food, technology, architecture, ritual practices, and ornaments, all of which combine to help shed some light on Halafian culture. As the archeologist Julian Reade, a keeper in the British Museum's Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities, states: "While we really know little about how the inhabitants of a Halaf village thought, let alone what language or languages they used for thinking, and what levels of abstraction could be expressed verbally, it seems likely they had comparable social structures, sharing many of the same implicit values, and that even those who did not travel regularly may have met from time to time in religious or administrative centres."[63]

Using the available archeological evidence, Reade, together with the archeologist Michael Roaf (former director of the British School of Archeology in Iraq, now at the University of California, Berkeley), has determined the boundaries of the Halaf culture. They coincide almost exactly with the area that

the ethnic Kurds still call home: from Kirmanshah to Adiyaman, and from Afrin near the Mediterranean Sea to northern areas of Lake Van. The distribution of Halaf pottery and of ethnic Kurds today are a near perfect match. (The single exception is the Mosul–Takrit region of the Mesopotamian lowlands.[64]) Some of the motifs and composite designs found on Halaf pottery and figurines can still be seen today in the textile and decorative designs of the modern Kurds who inhabit these former Halafian sites (see plate 92).[65]

It is highly unlikely that the Halaf people were an immigrant population. According to a number of demographic studies,[66] between around 10,000 and 3000 BC the Zagros Mountains were the site of perennial population surplus, which must have resulted in many waves of emigration. This population pressure was a consequence of successive technological advances in terms of crop cultivation and the domestication of animals; this resulted in a prosperous agricultural and trading economy, and thus a high population density. The Halafian phenomenon is most likely the result of a massive internal migration which succeeded in culturally unifying the population in Kurdistan.

The rapid spread of Halaf culture across large areas of the rugged Kurdish mountains is thought to have resulted from the development of a new lifestyle: nomadic herding. By the Halafian period all the prerequisite technologies, such as weaving, tanning, cooking, and metalurgy, had been developed, and the necessary animals – particularly the dog – had been domesticated by the settled agriculturists. Halafian figurines of dogs (with jaunty upcurled tails, uncharacteristic of any wolf) excavated from Jarmo in central Kurdistan provide the earliest definitive evidence of the development of "man's best friend" and the herder's most prized possession.[67] Nomadic herding has since been a very mobile cornerstone of the Zagros–Taurus cultures and societies.

Ubaid cultural period

The Halaf cultural period ends with the arrival in around 5300 BC of a new culture and, quite likely, a new people, known as the Ubaidians. Named after the archeological mound of al-Ubaid in modern Iraq, where their remains were first excavated, these people expanded in time from the plains of Mesopotamia and into the mountains. In doing so the Ubaidians – or the proto-Euphratians, as they are sometimes called – caused a hybrid culture to emerge in the mountains, comprising the earlier Halafian heritage superimposed by the new foreign influence. The Ubaid culture predominated in most of Kurdistan and Mesopotamia for around a thousand years.

Of the language and ethnic affiliation of the Ubaidians we know nothing beyond the barest conjecture. However, it was they who gave the names "Tigris" and "Euphrates" to the primary rivers of Kurdistan and Mesopotamia.[68] I have come to suspect that the Ubaidian people may be identical to or related to the enigmatic "Khaldi." The Khaldi are well represented in ancient Kurdistan, and were in time Kurdicized; they survive today in the form of the many Kurdish clans and tribes that bear variations of the old name, such as the modern Khallikan.[69] The modern survivors are found precisely where classical Greco-Roman sources recorded the Khaldi around two thousand years ago: mainly in northern and western Kurdistan. In support of this one may note the important fact that just as the Ubaidians were found in both lowland Mesopotamia and in highland Kurdistan, the same is true of the Khaldi, who were found in large numbers in both regions. Like their highland branch, the lowland Khaldi were also in time assimilated. In Mesopotamia, the Ubaidians were Semitized, becoming well known to history as the Chaldeans. Nonetheless, the Ubaidians' cultural impact on the mountain communities was widespread, if not, it would appear, particularly deep.

Hurrian cultural period

By approximately 4300 BC a new culture, and possibly a new people, had come to dominate the mountains: the Hurrians. We know much more of the Hurrians than we do of their predecessors, and the volume of our knowledge becomes greater as the time becomes more recent. We know, for example, that the Hurrians spread far and wide into the Zagros–Taurus–Pontus mountain systems, and intruded for a time also on the neighboring plains of Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau. They never expanded far from the mountains, however. Their economy was surprisingly integrated and focused, as were their political bonds, which ran largely parallel with the Zagros–Taurus–Pontus Mountains rather than radiating out to the lowlands, as was the case during the preceding Ubaid cultural period. Judging by the origin of archeological remains, economic exchanges between mountain and plain remained secondary in importance.

The Hurrians spoke a language – or properly, languages – of the northeastern group of the Caucasian family of languages, distantly related to modern Chechen and Lezgian. The direction of Hurrian expansion is not yet known, and by no means should it be taken as having been north–south, i.e., an expansion out of the Caucasus, as often is presumed without any evidence. It may well be that it was the prolific Hurrians who introduced northeast Caucasian languages into the Caucasus, rather than them having originated from that tiny, sparsely populated region.

For a long time the states founded by the Hurrians remained small. By around 2500 BC, however, a number of political–military entities had evolved out of the older Hurrian city states. Six of these are of special note: Urartu, Mushq (Mushku), Urkish, Subar (Saubar), Baini, Guti (Qutil), and Manna. The kingdom of Mushq is now believed to have brought about the final downfall of the Hittites in Anatolia. Their name survives in the city of Mush (Mus) in north-central Turkey. The Subaru, who operated from the areas north of modern Arbil in central Kurdistan, have left their name in the populous and historic Kurdish tribal confederacy of Zubari, who still inhabit the areas north of Arbil.

After gradually unifying the smaller mountain principalities, the Guti (Qutil) of central and southern Kurdistan became strong enough in 2250 BC to annex Sumeria and the rest of lowland Mesopotamia. A Guti dynasty ruled Sumeria for 130 years, until 2120 BC. The Guti are routinely presented in modern literature (by both Kurdish and Western authors) as being the earliest ancestors of the Kurds. This is clearly an historical error. Gutis are not the "earliest" ancestors of the Kurds any more than are other Hurrian peoples, or in fact, the earlier Halafian people(s). The source of this persistent error is partly a lack of in-depth knowledge of the region's ancient history on the part of casual authors, and also the superficial resemblance between the names Kurd and Guti. This erroneous assumption has become so pervasive in popular historiography that no contemporary writing on the Kurds that I have seen fails to mention the Guti as the ancestor of the Kurds. Modern Kurds have elevated the Guti to something like a semi-divine status. In reality, Guti are just one of the scores of Hurrian peoples whose cultural and genetic legacy forms the compound ancestry of the modern Kurds.[70]

Four renowned emporia, Arrap'ha, Melidi, Washukani, and Aratta, served the Hurrians in their trade with the economies outside the mountains. With certainty, Arrap'ha is to be identified with modern Kirkuk, and Melidi with Malatya, while Washukani and Aratta are probably to be identified, respectively, with the rich archeological sites of Godin Teppa (near Kangawar in southeastern Kurdistan, Iran) and Tell Fakhariya (west of Qamishli, in west-central Kurdistan, Syria). By the middle of the second millennium BC, the culture and people of Kurdistan appear to have been unified under a Hurrian identity.

In terms of the present culture of the Kurds, the legacy of the Hurrians is fundamental. It is manifest in the realm of Kurdish religion, mythology, material and martial arts, and even genetics. Nearly seventy-five percent of Kurdish clan names, and roughly fifty percent of topographical and urban names, are also of Hurrian origin. Examples are the Bukhti, Tirikan, Bazayni, Bakran, and Mand clans; the rivers Murat, Balik, and Khabur, and Lake Van; and the towns of Mardin, Ziwiya, and Dinawar. Mythological and religious symbols present in the art of the later Hurrian dynasties (such as the Mannaeans and Kassites of eastern Kurdistan, and the Lullubi of the southeast) are still to be found in the ancient Kurdish religion of Yazdanism, better known today as its various denominations of Alevism, Yezidism, and Yarsanism (Ahl-i-Haqq).

It is fascinating to see how many of the tattooing motifs that traditional Kurds use on their bodies are replicas of those that appear on Hurrian figurines. One example incorporates serpent, sun disc, dog, and comb/rain motifs. Some of these Hurrian motifs are also present in the religious decorative arts of the Yezidi Kurds, as found most prominently at the great shrine at Lalish.

It seems that by the end of the Hurrian period Kurdistan had become culturally and ethnically homogenized, forming a single civilization which was identified as such by the neighboring cultures and peoples. Sumerians, for example, called everybody in the Kurdish mountains "Subaru," while the Akkadians, Assyrians, and Babylonians used the term "Guti." To the ancient Jews, they were all the "Qarduim." All these appellations have modern representatives in the names of major Kurdish clans, and were by no means the artifacts of the imagination of those early Mesopotamians. The lowlanders of Mesopotamia must have seen the cultural (and presumably ethnic) uniformity of the peoples of the

Kurdish mountains, prompting them to call these mountaineers by the single native ethnic/tribal name that was most familiar to them at any given time. Likewise, today we know all of these same mountain people as Kurds.

This culturally homogenized Kurdistan was not to last, however.

Aryan cultural period

The Aryans were an Indo-European-speaking tribal people believed to have migrated from the plains of southern Russia to settle in Iran and northern India. The vanguards of these immigrants, such as the Hittites and the Mittani (Sindi), had arrived in southwestern Asia by 2000 BC. While the Hittites only marginally affected the mountain communities in Kurdistan, the Mittani settled inside Kurdistan around modern Diyarbakir, and influenced the natives in a number of notable areas, in particular in their introduction of knotted rug weaving. Indeed, some of the rug designs introduced by the Mittani – identified by their replication in Assyrian floor carvings – remain a hallmark of Kurdish rugs and kilims today. The modern *mina khani* and *chwarsuch* designs are basically the same as those the Assyrians copied from rugs and depicted in their floor designs nearly three thousand years ago.

The name "Mittani" survives today in the Kurdish clans of Mattini and Millani (Milli) who inhabit the exact same geographical areas of Kurdistan as did the ancient Mittani. The name "Mittan," however, is Hurrian rather than Aryan. At the onset of Aryan immigration into Kurdistan only the aristocracy and the high-ranking warrior groups were Aryans, while the bulk of the people were still Hurrian in all manners. The Mittani aristocratic house came almost certainly from the immigrant Sindi, who survive today in the populous Kurdish clan of Sindi – again – who inhabit the same area as that once occupied by the Mittani kingdom. These ancient Sindi seem to have been an Indic, not an Iranic, group of people, and in fact a branch of the better known Sindi of India/Pakistan, which has imparted its name to the River Indus and, indeed, to India itself.[71] While the bulk of the Sindi moved on to India, some wandered into Kurdistan to give rise to the Mittani royal house and the modern Sindi Kurds. Others remained in Europe and are recorded in the first century AD inhabiting the Taiman peninsula on the Sea of Azov between Russia and Ukraine.

As one might expect, the Mittani pantheon – including names like Indra, Varuna, Suriya, and Nasatya – is typically Indic. The Mittani could have introduced during this early period some of the Indic/Vedic tradition that appears to have survived in the Kurdish religion of Yazdanism.

It was around 1500 BC that the Mittani star shone at its brightest. The avalanche of further Indo-European tribes was to come later, in around 1200 BC, wreaking havoc on the economy and the settled culture of the mountains and lowlands alike. The north was settled by the Haigs (known to us now as the Armenians) while the rest of the mountains became the settlement targets of various Iranic peoples including the Medes, the Persians, the Scythians, the Sarmatians, and the Sagarthians (whose name survives in the name of the Zagros Mountains).

Aryan dynasties of different sizes and degrees of influence continued to appear in various corners of Kurdistan. None, however, equalled the power of the Mittani until the arrival of the Medes. The rise of the Medes from their capital at Ecbatana (modern Hamadan) in 727 BC coincided with the fall of the last major Hurrian kingdom (that of the Mannaeans). It is of the Medes that the Kurds have grown most fond – ignoring, in so doing, the proud legacy of the Hurrian states and even the empire of the Mittani. The Kurds regularly claim the Medes to be their ancestors, and others concur in this. But a cultural and ethnic evolution spanning many thousands of years preceded the arrival and subsequent rise to prominence of the Medes in Kurdistan. In reality, the Medes are no more the ancestors of the modern Kurds than are the Halafian, Hurrian, and Mittani peoples who came before them, or the legion of other peoples and states that came after them.[72] Nonetheless, today, the first Kurdish satellite television transmitter has been given the name "Med TV" (Kurdish for "Median TV"). The Kurds' fascination with the Median empire, which ended in 549 BC, remains supreme.

It is surprising to most that among modern Kurds the Aryan culture was and still remains secondary to that of the Hurrians. In fact, the Aryan nomads brought very little culture with them to add to what they found already present in the Zagros–Taurus region. Cultural sophistication is not something that nomads are generally known for; indeed, in the fight for land and political dominance they have been inclined to destroy what settled life and culture they have found in their path. There is ample evidence – including an economic dark age

lasting for roughly five hundred years in the areas touched by the Ayrans – to suggest that the Aryan nomads behaved very much in this way.

By 850 BC the last Hurrian states had been extinguished by the invading Aryans, whose sheer number of immigrants must have been considerable. The people progressively came to speak the Indo-European language of the Aryan immigrants, and a change in genetic makeup meant that inhabitants gradually became lighter in their complexion. By about the third century BC the Aryanization of the mountain communities was virtually complete. The linguistic and genetic shift was a gradual one, however, and there appear to have been no abrupt cultural changes (barring the appearance of so-called "gray ware" pottery). Architecture (both domestic and monumental), decorative arts, farming techniques, herding practices, and religion remained very much the same (although new deities were introduced into the old Hurrian pantheon).

It would seem to be during the Aryan period that the designation "Kurd" first appeared. The victory cylinder of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (r. 1114–1076 BC) is the oldest record of the name that has been found to date. It records the "Kurti" or "Qurtie" among the peoples whom the king conquered in his mountain campaigns south of the Lake Van region. The same document gives the location of these "Kurti" as being Mt. Azu (Hazu). We are extraordinarily lucky that this "address" was still current until about sixty years ago: the town of Kurti, in the Mt. Hizan region south of Lake Van, is undoubtedly the same as the Kurti in the "Mt. Azu" of the Assyrians. The town of Kurti was still serving as a seat of a Kurdish princely house when the Kurdish historian Sharafuddin of Bitlis added the dynasty's history to his celebrated *Sharafnama* in 1597. This "birthplace" of the Kurds continued to be known by its archaic name until the Turkish government changed it and that of its eponymous river to Bahcesaray in the 1930s.

The Akkadian term "Kurti" was used around the second millennium BC to denote an indeterminate portion of groups of inhabitants of the Zagros (and eastern Taurus) Mountains. For their part, the Babylonians until their demise in the sixth century BC loosely (and apparently pejoratively) called almost everybody who lived in the Zagros-Taurus area a "Guti" – including the Medes. But Babylonian records also attest to many more specific subdivisional names such as the Mardi, Kardaka, Lullubi, and Qardu.

By the third century BC, at any rate, the term Kurd (or rather "Kurti") had been conclusively established. Polybius (d. c. 133 BC), when reporting on the events of 221–20 BC,[73] and Strabo (d. c. AD 48),[74] are as far as I am aware the earliest Western sources to have mentioned the Kurds with their present ethnic name, albeit in the Greek form of *Kurtioi* or the Latin *Cyrtii*. The historians Livy, Pliny, Plutarch, and, much later, Procopius also used this ethnic name for the native population of Media and parts of Anatolia in classical times. Ptolemy, too, provides us with useful information: his recording of toponyms – i.e., where a clan resided – inadvertently provides us with an array of Kurdish clan names.[75] These include Bagraoandene for the Bagrawand or Bakran of Diyarbakir; Belcanea for the Belikan of Antep; Tigranoandene for the Tirigan of Hakkari; Sophene for the Subhan of Elazig; Derzene for the Dersimi; and Bokhtanoi for the Bokhtan (Bohtan). These clans still exist today.

When the Aryan Medes, Persians, and Sagarthians arrived on the eastern flanks of the Zagros around 1000 BC, a massive internal migration from the eastern Taurus and northern and central Zagros toward the southern Zagros was in progress. By the sixth century BC, many of the large tribes which we now find among the Kurds were also present in the southern Zagros, in Fars, and even Kerman. As early as the third century BC, the "Kurtioi" are reported by Greek authors to be as widespread in the southern Zagros (Persis, Pars, or Fars) as they were in the central and northern Zagros (Kurdistan proper). A thousand years later, the ethnic name of "Kurd" had become established for nearly all, if not all, the inhabitants of the mountains, from the Straits of Hormuz to the heart of Anatolia.

The northern Zagros and Anatolia once teemed with various related groups of people speaking Iranic tongues. By the first century AD, many of these peoples – such as the Pontians, the Commagene, the Cappadocians, the western Medes, and the Indic Mittani – had been totally absorbed into a new Kurdish ethnic pool, just like the Hurrian Manna, the Lullubi, the Subaru, the Guti, and the Kardaka before them. These are among many mountain-inhabiting peoples whose assimilation has formed genetically, culturally, socially, and linguistically the contemporary Kurds. The Kurdish diversity of race, tradition, and spoken dialects

encountered today points to the direction of this compound identity. Their memory is most tangible in the survival of their names among the family clan names in Kurdistan.

Reflecting on the gradual and organic assimilation of one of these groups into the larger Kurdish ethnic pool, Pliny the Elder (d. AD 79) tries to reconcile what appeared to him to be simply a name change for a familiar people. Enumerating the nations of the known world, he states: "Joining on to Adiabene [central Kurdistan around Arbil] are the people formerly called the Carduchi [the Kardukhoi] and now the Cordueni past whom flows the river Tigris ..."[76]

The Carduchi mentioned by Pliny are the same people as those encountered by the Greek historian Xenophon and his troops nearly three centuries earlier when retreating through Kurdistan in 401 BC; Xenophon called them the "Kardukhoi."[77] The name is likely to be a variant of "Qardu" (a people that provided part of the Babylonian royal guards before 530 BC) and "Qarduim" (mentioned frequently in the Talmud).[78]

By 300 BC many important Kurdish states had emerged. The Kurdish clan of Cappadocia (the Malatya and Kaysari areas in Turkey), for example, spread to establish not only the Zelanid dynasty of Commagene but also the Zelanid kingdom of Cappadocia and the Zelanid empire of Pontus – all in Anatolia. Pontus, under the direction of Emperor Mithridates VI, the Great (d. 63 BC), expanded into southeastern Europe and the Ukraine, striking alliances with the Gauls in France and the Iberians in Spain for an orchestrated assault on Italy to snuff out the rising star of Rome. The decades of land and sea campaigns that ensued were held by Roman historians of all periods to have been the single greatest threat to Roman survival. Mithridates' universal declaration of the abolition of slavery gained him a lasting respect as the "first emancipator." His death ended the chances of Kurdish resistance to Roman expansion into western Asia, and the dramatic finale came at the Battle of Zela in 47 BC between Emperor Pharnaces II (son of Mithridates) and Julius Caesar.

In time all the Kurdish kingdoms of the west became Roman vassals, and this was followed by further loss of independence in the course of the first century AD. In the east the Kurdish kingdoms of Adiabene, Sophene, Gordyene, Cortea, Media, Sambatae, Arrap'ha, and Kirm had, by the first century BC, become confederate members of the Parthian federation. By this time, also, the use of the name "Kurd" for the people had become prevalent in classical texts.

While all the larger Kurdish kingdoms of the west gradually lost their existence, in the east they survived into the third century AD and the advent of the Sasanian Persian empire. The last major Kurdish dynasty, the Kayosids, fell in AD 380. However, some smaller Kurdish principalities (called the *Kofyar*, "mountain administrators") preserved their autonomy beyond the seventh century and the advent of Islam.

The eclipse of Sasanian and Byzantine power by the Muslim caliphate in the seventh century, and its own subsequent weakening, permitted the Kurdish principalities and "mountain administrators" to set up new, independent kingdoms in the tenth century. The Shadadid (Shadanid) of the Caucasus and Armenia, the Rawwadid (Rewandid) of Azerbaijan, the Marwanid of western Kurdistan, the Hasanwayhid, Fadilwayhid, Kakawayhid, and Ayyarid of the central Zagros, and the Shabankara of Fars were some of these Kurdish kingdoms.

The Ayyubid (1169–c. 1550) stand out by the vastness of their domain. Establishing their capital at Cairo, they ruled the territories of Libya, Egypt, Nubia and northern Sudan, western Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Palestine, Armenia and, of course, much of Kurdistan. As the custodians of Islam's holy cities of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem, the Ayyubid were instrumental in the defeat and expulsion of the Crusaders from the Holy Land. The founder of the dynasty, Saladin (1137–93), a Kurd who lived in the Mesopotamia area, achieved lasting admiration from friends and foes alike for his magnanimity, humanity, and valor. He is known by the epithet "Prince of Chivalry" in the annals of the Crusades.

Early Islamic sources enumerate dozens of Kurdish tribes and family clans outside Kurdistan proper in the southern Zagros, the Caucasus, the Elburz, the Taurus, and the Amanus Mountains. In time, however, all these different groups became assimilated into the local population. This fact has been a source of puzzlement for many modern writers on Kurdish history. Unaware of the history and extent of early Kurdish migrations, and finding, at present, very few Kurds in these other mountain areas, they have often drawn the misguided conclusion that the term "Kurd" could not have been an ethnic name but rather a designator for all mountain nomads in general. This facile hypothesis is hardly worthy

of refutation; no such doubt is cast on other mobile nations such as the Turks or the Arabs, who have spread and contracted periodically over thousands of miles of territory.[79]

Despite the advent of new empires, the introduction of new religions, and the arrival of new immigrants, Kurdish culture remained basically unchanged from the time the Kurds were Aryanized until the sixteenth century. The Kurds remained primarily followers of the ancient Hurrian religion of Yazdanism and spoke an Iranic language that medieval Islamic sources term Pahlawani; this language survives today in the dialects of Gurani and Dimili (Zaza) on the peripheries of Kurdistan. The only noteworthy events are the disappearance of Kurds of the southern Zagros through their assimilation into the Lors (Luri), and a fresh expansion of Kurds into the Elburz and Pontus Mountains.

Semitic and Turkic periods

Kurdistan continued to receive new peoples and cultural influences, but none was strong enough to alter the Kurdish cultural and ethnic identity to the same extent as the Aryans had done. Large numbers of Aramaic-speaking people entered the region from Syria, but they seem to have settled only in the more accessible valleys of western Kurdistan. However, through the introduction of Judaism in the first century BC, and later Christianity in the third century AD, some Kurds came to speak Aramaic rather than Kurdish – despite the relatively small size of the original Aramaic-speaking population. It is fascinating to note, through examining contemporary Kurdish culture, that Judaism appears to have exercised a much deeper and more lasting influence on indigenous Kurdish culture and religion than did Christianity. This is despite the fact that Kurds produced some of the earliest known Christian communities in the world, as early as the second century AD,[80] and that most of the Kurds' neighbors between the fifth and twelfth centuries were Christians.

The role of the Arabs and the impact of Islam on Kurdish society and culture is more straightforward to survey. The Arabian peninsula was experiencing a population explosion when the advent of Islam translated that pressure into a massive Arab migration in the seventh to eleventh centuries and brought about their settlement of foreign lands. In Kurdistan, Arab tribes settled near almost every major town and agricultural center. Islamic historians and geographers report that by the tenth century Arab populations were living among the Kurds from the northern shores of Lake Van to Dinawar and from Hamadan to Malatya. These eventually became assimilated, leaving behind only their genetic imprint (as the darker-complexioned city Kurds) and the bequest of two exotic Semitic sounds to the speech of many Kurds: glottal *a* and *h*.

This fleeting influence is mirrored by the story of the Turkic settlement of parts of Kurdistan. From the twelfth century onward Turkic nomadic passage through Kurdistan – which lasted several centuries – wreaked havoc on the settled Kurds and their economy, just as the Aryan migrations had done 2,500 years earlier. Most Kurdish states became vassals to various Turkic kingdoms and empires. Kurdish principalities, however, survived and continued their autonomous existence until the nineteenth century. From time to time they were able to rule independently, when local empires weakened or collapsed.

The arrival of the Turkic peoples had little impact on Kurdish culture, but the forces of internal change that their arrival unleashed within Kurdish society turned out to be nearly as decisive as the Aryan invasion and settlement two millennia earlier. Kurdistan would surely have been Turkified under this tremendous nomadic pressure had it not been for one group of Kurdish nomads: the energetic Kurmanj, who emerged from the Hakkari Highlands to fill nearly every niche left vacant by the agriculturist Kurds and less energetic nomads succumbing to the Turkic pressure. The Turks were primarily steppe nomads, and proved less of a match for the Kurmanj mountain nomads in the rough terrain of Kurdistan. Some Kurds were Turkified, no doubt, including the populous tribes of Dimbuli, Shaqaqi, Barani, and Jevanshir. Conversely, many Kurdish tribes with Turkic names (for example, Karachul, Chol, Oghaz, Jambul, Devalu, Karaqich) are in fact assimilated Turkish and Turkoman tribes who retained their Turkish names, but became Kurdicized in every other respect.

This massive tribal dislocation, which might have subsided over time, took a new and more destructive turn in the early sixteenth century. This saw the beginning of a century-long holocaust in Kurdish and Armenian territories in eastern Anatolia, forcing millions of settled Kurds to become nomadic. The Perso–Ottoman wars (1514 to 1639), and the deadly economic blow brought about by the shift away from the Silk Road to sea transport

for East–West commerce by the beginning of the sixteenth century, left Kurdistan and the remainder of the Middle East high and dry – and utterly broke.

By 1500 there were over a score of independent Kurdish kingdoms and principalities, some of them well-established states with currencies of their own, and boasting dynastic histories already hundreds of years old. None, however, showed any inclination to unify Kurdistan. In this Kurdistan resembled pre-1872 Germany, where dozens of small principalities coexisted alongside larger kingdoms, all German in their ethnicity, but displaying little interest in merging into a united nation. Unification was achieved only through force by the strongest among them, Prussia. To the regret of the Kurds, no successful counterpart of Prussia emerged in Kurdistan, although many tried and a few came close to success.

The advent of the Safavid and Ottoman empires in the area in the sixteenth century and their division of Kurdistan into two uneven imperial dependencies was on a par with the practice of the preceding few centuries. Their introduction of heavy artillery, and their policies of destroying the Kurds' culture and livelihood, were new and devastating developments. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries vast portions of Kurdistan were destroyed and large numbers of Kurds were deported to the far corners of the Safavid and Ottoman empires. This destruction was not the outcome of conventional warfare but rather the byproduct of a strategic policy known as "scorched earth," which entails the destruction of any facilities and resources that might be useful to an advancing army. Realizing their weakness compared to the Ottoman army, the Safavid Persians destroyed bridges, roads, villages, crops, forests, water storage facilities and wells, and even entire towns and cities. The inhabitants were then herded up and forced to march en masse into the interior of Persia. The battlefield between these powers just happened to be in Kurdistan and Armenia, and the brunt of this strategic decision was naturally borne by those two peoples. As the bloody wars between the Safavids and the Ottomans continued, the scorched earth destruction was repeated to prevent any sprouting of domesticity in the moonscape which the Safavids needed to place between themselves and the Ottomans. Only the hardiest and the most elusive of nomads and nomadic lords could escape this sustained 125-year-long devastation against civilized life in Kurdistan. And, naturally, it was these people – the toughest of nomads – who ultimately inherited the land.

The combination of devastating wars, increased nomadism, and change in international trade routes heralded the beginning of the end for much of the sedentary social fabric and sophisticated culture of Kurdistan as it had existed since the time of the Medes. The formerly agriculturist, urban-based Kurdish culture and society was to shift to a nomadic economy under a newly assumed identity. The nomadized Kurdish farmers eventually accepted Shafi'ite Sunni Islam from the Kurmanj nomads and began speaking the vernacular of Kurmanji, a Kurdish dialect. In time, the traditional elements of Kurdish culture – including their religion and language – were marginalized and pushed to the peripheries of the region.

Following a period of relative stability in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Kurdish fiefdoms and principalities saw their power dissipated. By the end of the nineteenth century, all the Kurdish self-ruled territories had been conquered and brought under firm control by the Ottomans and Persians. After World War I, despite calls for an independent Kurdish state, France and Great Britain divided the former Ottoman territories according to their own needs, apportioning Kurdish areas to the new states of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. The Kurds residing in Persia and Russia remained under the jurisdiction of Tehran and Moscow.

At present more than seventy-five percent of Kurds speak various dialects of Kurmanji, and similar numbers practice Shafi'ite Sunni Islam. In a sense, the "Kurmanj" assimilated the "Kurds," and in the process they assumed the old ethnic name and inherited all that was left of the older culture. Until the mid-twentieth century a vast majority of the "Kurds" would identify themselves simply as Kurmanj, and their language as Kurmanji. It was outsiders and the educated that continued to call them all Kurds, regardless of the dialect they spoke, the religion they adhered to, or the lifestyle they led. In the past fifty years, however, the term Kurmanj as an ethnic designator has been suppressed by both the native population and their leadership in favor of the time-honored term, "Kurd." Only in the most remote areas in the mountains and the detached but populous Kurdish exclaves in Khurasan and Turkmenistan is the term "Kurmanj" given routinely by the common people for their ethnic affiliation. This, too, is disappearing fast under the influence of educated Kurds.

pl	tribe / location	size	knot	warp	weft	wefts between knots	count	sides	ends	notes
1	Sonqor?	6'5"x16'5" (196 x 500 cm)	sy	C	C	1	H-8 V-8	missing	missing	
2	Koliya'i	9'3"x23'0" (282 x 701 cm)	sy	C	W	2	H-10 V-7	missing	missing	
3	Koliya'i	3'8"x6'11" (112 x 211 cm)	sy	W	W	2-4	H-6 V-6	overcast	brown weft	
4	Koliya'i	4'0"x8'7" (122 x 262 cm)	sy	W grey	W	1-2	H-6 V-7	overcast	brocaded plainweave	
5	Koliya'i	3'7"x6'11" (109 x 211 cm)	sy	W light brown	W	2	H-6 V-6	overcast	plainweave; warps plaited one end	
6	Koliya'i	8'0"x15'0" (244 x 457 cm)	sy	W ivory	W	1	H-7 V-7	missing	missing	
7	Koliya'i	4'2"x8'11" (127 x 272 cm)	sy	W brown	W	2-3	H-8 V-10	missing	missing	
8	Koliya'i	3'0"x6'2" (92 x 188 cm)	sy	W ivory	C	2	H-9 V-7	missing	missing	
9	Kandula	3'8"x5'5" (112 x 165 cm)	sy	W tan	camel hair	1	H-7 V-8	missing	missing	
10	Sanjabi	2'11"x2'8" (89 x 81 cm)	sy	C ivory	W	1	H-10 V-12	overcast	overcast	
11	west of Shiraz	6'1"x14'0" (185 x 427 cm)	–	W brown	W	–	–	–	–	kilim
12	Jaf	4'10"x8'0" (147 x 244 cm)	sy	W ivory	W	2	H-6 V-8	offset	overcast	
13	Jaf	3'9"x6'4" (114 x 193 cm)	sy	W ivory	W brown	2	H-12 V-7	overcast	missing	
14	Jaf	3'11"x10'3" (119 x 313 cm)	sy	W mixed brown & ivory	W red	2	H-6	V-6	overcast	
15	Jaf?	5'2"x9'1" (159 x 382 cm)	sy	W ivory	W red	2	H-7 V-8	missing	missing	
16	Jaf	2'0"x3'4" (61 x 102 cm)	sy	W ivory	W brown, ivory	2	H-7 V-10	offset	overcast	back: kilim with brocading
17	Jaf	5'2"x9'1" (158 x 277 cm)	–	C	W	–	–	–	embroidery	kilim
18	Jaf	5'10"x10'10" (178 x 330 cm)	–	C	W	–	–	–	–	kilim
19	Jaf	6'0"x9'7" (182 x 292 cm)	–	C	W	–	–	–	–	kilim
20	Diza'i	3'11"x5'8" (119 x 173 cm)	sy	C camel	W	1-2	H-7 V-6	missing	missing	
21	Arbil	4'5"x13'4" (135 x 406 cm)	–	C, W, goat hair	W	–	–	soumak work in border	plaited	kilim

Structural analyses

knot

all knots in wool unless otherwise indicated

sy = symmetrically knotted

warp/weft

C = cotton

W = wool

pl.	tribe / location	size	knot	warp	weft	wefts between knots	count	sides	ends	notes
22	Herki?	4'5"x5'11" (135 x 180 cm)	sy	W brown	W dark brown, red, brown	3	H-8 V-8	missing	missing	
23	Herki	2'10"x10'5" (86 x 318 cm)	sy	W brown, ivory	W ivory, honey	2	H-8 V-7	missing	missing	
24	Herki	3'1"x11'9" (94 x 358 cm)	sy	W	C	3-5	H-9 V-8	overcast	missing	
25	Herki	3'7"x8'0" (109 x 245 cm) incomplete	sy	W ivory	W brown	3-4	H-6 V-7	overcast 8-cord selvedge	top blue-green; bottom missing	offset knots in field, regular knots in border
26	Central or Northern Kurdistan	2'10"x4'8" (86 x 142 cm) incomplete	sy	W	W					not examined
27	Central or Northern Kurdistan	5'7"x7'6" (170 x 235 cm) incomplete	sy	W	W					not examined
28	Senna	6'5"x10'0" (196 x 305 cm)	sy	W ivory	W ivory	1-2	H-8 V-8	missing	missing	
29	Senna	3'9"x4'1" (114 x 125 cm)	sy	C ivory	C ivory	1	H-17 V-16	missing	missing	
30	Senna	4'3"x5'4" (130 x 163 cm)	–	W tan	W	-	-	green weft on one warp	red band, yellow and sewn through	kilim
31	Senna	5'2"x8'3" (158 x 252 cm)	sy	C ivory	C blue	1	H-13 V-12	missing	kilim cords sewn through	
32	Senna	4'5"x6'9" (135 x 206 cm)	sy	silk	silk	1	H-17 V-20	overcast silk	4 lines of kilim soumak	
33	Senna or Garrus	4'10"x5'9" (147 x 175 cm)	sy	silk	C	1	H-19 V-18	missing	missing	
34	Garrus	6'2"x14'0" (188 x 427 cm)	sy	W	W	2	H-12 V-13	overcast	missing	
35	Garrus	8'9"x16'10" (267 x 513 cm)	sy	W	W	2	H-11 V-12	missing	missing	
36	Garrus	4'4"x8'2" (132 x 249 cm)	sy	W	W	2	H-14 V-11	missing	missing	
37	Garrus	4'7"x9'3" (140 x 282 cm)	sy	W	W	2	H-10 V-11	missing	missing	
38	Garrus	4'6"x8'10" (137 x 269 cm)	–	W	W	ground pattern 2	–	missing	missing	soumak
39	Garrus	4'5"x5'1" (135 x 155 cm)	–	W	W	–	–	missing	missing	kilim with silver
40	Sa'uj Bulagh	4'3"x7'4" (130 x 224 cm)	sy	C	W	2	H-9 V-10	overcast	missing	
41	Sa'uj Bulagh	6'9"x7'10" (206 x 239 cm) section	sy	C	W	2				not examined
42	Sa'uj Bulagh	6'4"x12'11" (193 x 394 cm)	sy	W	W	2-3	H-7 V-7	missing	missing	

pl	tribe / location	size	knot	warp	weft	wefts between knots	count	sides	ends	notes
43	Sa'uj Bulagh	6'6" x 16'9" (198 x 511 cm)	sy	W	W	2	H-5 V-8			
44	Sa'uj Bulagh	1'10" x 7'8" (56 x 234 cm) section	sy	W	W	2	H-6 V-7	missing	missing	
45	Sa'uj Bulagh	7'6" x 17'0" (229 x 518 cm)	sy	C	W	2	H-9 V-8	missing	missing	
46	Sa'uj Bulagh	5'9" x 8'6" (175 x 259 cm)	sy	C	C	2	H-9 V-15	missing	missing	
47	Sa'uj Bulagh	5'9" x 11'0" (175 x 335 cm)	sy	W	W red	2	H-7 V-10	overcast	missing	
48	Sa'uj Bulagh	4'1" x 6'11" (124 x 211 cm)	sy	W	W red	2	H-5 V-10	overcast	missing	
49	Sa'uj Bulagh	4'4" x 7'4" (133 x 215 cm)	sy	W ivory	W red	2	H-5 V-10	missing	missing	
50	north of Sa'uj Bulagh	2'9" x 8'7" (84 x 262 cm)	sy	W tan	W tan	2	H-6 V-6	missing	missing	
51	north of Sa'uj Bulagh	3'5" x 8'6" (105 x 261 cm)	sy	W brown	W brown, red	2	H-7 V-7	overcast		
52	Sa'uj Bulagh area	6'0" x 10'11" (183 x 333 cm)	sy	W	W red	2	H-8 V-8	missing	missing	
53	Varamin	4'1" x 11'10" (124 x 361 cm)	sy	W	W	1-2	H-7 V-11	overcast	kilim	
54	Zanjan	4'3" x 6'6" (130 x 198 cm)	sy	W ivory	C brown	2	H-6 V-8	missing	missing	
55	Zanjan	4'5" x 9'3" (135 x 282 cm)	sy	W brown	W red-brown	2	H-8 V-7	figure 8	missing	
56	Shanbo	5'10" x 10'6" (179 x 323 cm)	sy	W mixed brown & ivory	W yellow, red, green, blue, black	2	H-6 V-10	2 cord selvedges overcast	missing	
57	Hakkari Heights	6'10" x 10'10" (208 x 330 cm)	sy	W	C, W	2	H-7 V-8	missing	missing	
58	Hakkari	6'2" x 11'5" (188 x 348 cm)	sy	W	W	4	H-7 V-7	missing	missing	
59	Northern Kurdistan	4'0" x 11'6" (122 x 351 cm)	–	W	W	–	–	–	–	kilim
60	Hakkari region	2'7" x 12'7" (79 x 384 cm)	sy	W brown	W brown	2-3	H-6 V-7	missing	missing	
61	Hakkari region	2'9" x 5'4" (84 x 163 cm)	sy	W ivory	W brown	2	H-6 V-7	missing	missing	
62	near Lake Urmia	3'10" x 12'0" (117 x 366 cm)	sy	W brown	W brown	2-4	H-7 V-8	overcast red, blue	missing	
63	Shakak?	4'4" x 8'0" (132 x 244 cm)	sy	W ivory	W blue, red, green, brown	4-5	H-5 V-8	6 warps overcast	missing	
64	Shakak?	4'7" x 6'5" (140 x 196 cm)	sy	W brown	W brown	2	H-11 V-8	missing	missing	

pl.	tribe / location	size	knot	warp	weft	wefts between knots	count	sides	ends	notes
65	Shaqaqi	3'5"x 11'8" (104 x 356 cm)	sy	W tan	C natural	2-3	H-10 V-9	missing	missing	
66	Shaqaqi	3'9"x 12'10" (114 x 391 cm)	sy	W brown	W red, peach	3-4	H-9 V-8	missing	missing	
67	Shaqaqi	3'4"x 5'9" (102 x 175 cm) incomplete	sy	W brown	W light brown	2	H-9 V-9	2 warps overcast	missing	
68	Shaqaqi	4'0"x 11'10" (122 x 361 cm)	sy	C ivory	C ivory	2	H-7 V-8	6 warps overcast	missing	
69	Khallikan?	3'2"x 13'4" (97 x 406 cm)	sy	W	W brown	2	H-6 V-7	missing	missing	
70	southeast of Lake Van	3'3"x 8'3" (99 x 251 cm)	sy	W	W brown	1-2	H-8 V-8	missing	missing	
71	southeast of Lake Van	6'0"x 10'0" (185 x 307 cm)	–	W brown	W	–	–	–	–	kilim
72	west of Lake Van	3'7"x 9'3" (109 x 282 cm)	sy	W brown	W tan, brown	3-4	H-6 V-6	missing	missing	
73	Paziki?	3'8"x 6'10" (112 x 208 cm)	sy	W brown	W brown	3-4	H-5 V-6	4 cord selvedge, red selvedge	kilim, brown	
74	Northern Kurdistan	3'3"x 6'11" (99 x 211 cm)	sy	W brown, ivory	W brown	2	H-6 V-7	selvedge	missing	
75	Northern Kurdistan	3'3"x 5'10" (100 x 179 cm) incomplete	sy	W brown	W brown	2	H-6 V-6	2 cord selvedge, overcast, brown	missing	
76	Shahsavan?	5'8"x 7'9" (173 x 236 cm)	sy	W ivory	C ivory	3	H-9 V-9	missing	missing	
77	south Caucasus?	3'1"x 7'0" (95 x 215 cm)	sy	W brown	W brown	2	H-8 V-5	2 cord selvedge	top kilim braided; bottom missing	
78	northeast of Van	3'11"x 7'2" (119 x 218 cm)	sy	W brown	W brown, ivory	2	H-7 V-7	3 warp overcast	kilim, dark brown	
79	Kars	4'0"x 6'4" (122 x 193 cm)	sy	W brown	W brown	2-4	H-7 V-7	missing	missing	
80	west central Caucasus	6'0"x 6'10" (185 x 210 cm)	sy	W ivory	W blue-green, brown	2-3	H-8 V-6	overcast, red, blue, green	not original	
81	west central Caucasus	4'8"x 7'4" (142 x 224 cm)	sy	W pink-red	W pink-red	2-3	H-7 V-9	8 cord selvedge	kilim, pink-red	
82	Zakatali area	3'3"x 5'7" (100 x 172 cm)	sy goat hair	W, goat hair	W, goat hair	10	H-4 V-4	2 cord selvedge	ends braided	
83	Malatya	5'11"x 8'11" (180 x 272 cm)	–	W	W	3-5	–	–	–	kilim
84	Arapkir	3'3"x 6'0" (99 x 183 cm)	sy	W ivory	W brown	2-3	H-6 V-7	4 cord selvedge	kilim, brown	
85	near Aynt'ab	4'4"x 7'5" (132 x 226 cm)	sy	W ivory	W red	4	H-5 V-8	missing	missing	

pl	tribe / location	size	knot	warp	weft	wefts between knots	count	sides	ends	notes
86	Aynt'ab	3'6"x5'2" (108 x 159 cm) incomplete	sy	W brown	W brown	2-3	H-8 V-11	missing	top missing; bottom original kilim, dark red	
87	Bey Dagi Mountains	2'7"x5'8" (79 x 173 cm) incomplete	sy	W ivory	W red	3-5	H-5 V-4	4 cord selvedge	missing	
88	Sinan	3'11"x5'0" (119 x 152 cm) incomplete	sy	W ivory	W brown	3-4	H-4 V-10	3 cord selvedge	missing kilim, dark	
89	Divrigi	3'7"x6'11" (110 x 213 cm)	sy	W ivory	W brown	3-4	H-9 V-9	missing	missing	
90	Zara	4'0"x8'3" (122 x 251 cm)	sy	W tan	W brown	2-4	H-8 V-6	2 warps wrapped	missing	
91	Sivas area?	5'7"x7'9" (170 x 235 cm)	sy	W	W					not examined
92	Western Kurdistan	2'8"x4'0" (82 x 123 cm) incomplete	sy	W brown	W peach	4	H-8 V-7	missing	missing	
93	Cihanbeyli	5'3"x9'3" (160 x 282 cm)	sy	W ivory	W red	3-4	H-5 V-5	overcast multiple cord selvedge, red and purple wool	missing	
94	Cihanbeyli	3'11"x10'0" (119 x 305 cm)	sy	W ivory, brown	W ivory, purple, brown, red, yellow	3-4	H-5 V-4	8 cord selvedge overcast	kilim, red	
95	Haymana	4'5"x6'10" (135 x 208 cm)	sy	W brown	W brown	3	H-7 V-7	2 cord selvedge	kilim, brown	
96	Yunak	3'2"x11'0" (97 x 335 cm)	sy	W ivory	W brown blue	3	H-6 V-7	missing	missing	
97	Karaman	4'0"x11'0" (122 x 335 cm)	sy	W ivory	W brown	2-3	H-5 V-6	4 cord selvedge overcast brown	missing	
98	Darreh Gaz	5'5"x11'8" (165 x 356 cm)	sy	W	W red	3	H-6 V-6	2 selvedge overcast		
99	Darreh Gaz	4'7"x8'8" (140 x 264 cm) reduced	sy	W ivory	W red	3-4	H-5 V-8	missing	kilim, red	
100	Oghaz?	5'2"x9'3" (157 x 282 cm)	sy	W, goat hair	W red	2	H-8 V-6		missing	

1 This is excepting a short spell in 1946, when a portion of the Iranian sector of Kurdistan declared and maintained an independent republic.
2 See Creasey, 1961, pp. 348–49.
3 Good Persian carpets were still being woven in Khurasan (eastern Persia) in the eighteenth century.
4 Russia wanted to possess the Black Sea to carry out their plans of expansion and return Constantinople to Christianity. A series of wars with the Ottomans took place between 1710 and 1792. See Creasey, 1961.
5 Strong English and American markets for oriental carpets are evidenced by eighteenth-century paintings. All the prosperous American colonists, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, had oriental carpets in their homes.
6 Edwards, 1953, p. 5.
7 *Grass*, made by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack, 1925, distributed by Milestone Film and Video, New York.
8 They do, however, show similarities with the work of the Lors and Bakhtiari. These peoples were historically Kurdish in origin, but had become separate ethnic groups by the sixteenth century. Therefore their work is not included in this book.
9 For example: Father Giuseppe Campanile (1818); J. Baillie Fraser (1840); Sir John Kinneir (1813); Karstens Niebuhr (1779); Claudius Rich (1838).
10 Eagleton, 1988.
11 Stanzer, 1988.
12 The Yazdani religion is a native Kurdish religion. See further discussion, page 25.
13 In the Kurdish version of this story, Noah took other people in addition to his wife, sons, and daughters-in-law on the Ark.
14 As the story goes, Khidir frequently leaves the water and changes his shape to appear as someone else, especially to Sufis. According to the Kurds (who tend to be very superstitious) if one sees an old man or woman who needs help alongside a path, it might be Khidir in disguise. If it is Khidir and the person does not help him, he or she will meet with extremely bad luck.
15 Akasheh, 1986.
16 The Jewish community is all but gone today. Prior to the end of World War II this was due to the Zionist recruitment of Jews to populate Palestine. Following the creation of Israel in 1948, the anti-Semitic policies of the Iraqi governments caused a massive emigration of the Jews, leaving behind only a few hundred Jewish families in the entire area.
17 Fraser, 1840, pp. 190–91.
18 Rich, 1838, vol. 1, pp. 112, 114.
19 Eagleton, 1988.
20 Campanile, 1818. Translated for the author by Deborah A. Spenser.
21 Campanile, 1818, article VI, p. 23.
22 Rich, 1838, vol. 1, p. 71.
23 Fraser, 1840, p. 148.
24 A brief history of the Zelans is provided in the Appendix essay.
25 The Shanbo are an old Kurdish dynasty that resided from ancient times in the Hakkari Highlands. They were mentioned by Ptolemy in the first century AD. The Shanbo ruled off and on in the Hakkari Highlands from the twelfth to the middle of the nineteenth century. They were defeated in 1470 by the AqQuyunlu (whose name means "White Sheep Turkomans" because they supposedly had white sheep) but came back in successive generations until defeated by the Ottomans in 1849. The Shanbo were members of the Yezidi branch of the Yazdani ("Cult of Angels") religion. The Hakkari Shanbo heraldic emblem is a singular motif in the weavings produced by the clans of Hakkari as well as by the nomads living to the north, south, and east of the region.
26 "Herki" is the root for the name "Hakkari," the area where the Shanbo ruled. The term itself means "a Hurrian" in Kurdish, and was gradually changed from Hurrakan to Hurraki, then to Herraki or Harraka, and eventually to Herki.
27 Senna's modern name, "Sanandaj," means "mountain castle."
28 Kinneir, 1813.
29 Tavernier, 1970, vol. 1, book 2, p. 251.
30 Malcolm, 1828.
31 Rich, 1838, vol. 1, p. 209.
32 *Hali*, 4, 3, 1982, p. 8, advertisement of Vojtech Blau Inc., New York. 3'11" x 5'5" (120 x 165 cm).
33 Lefevre, London, auction catalogue, 21 May 1976, lot 25 (front cover). 3'4" x 4'7" (102 x 140 cm).
34 *Hali*, 64, August 1992, p. 52. 5'9" x 10'1" (175 x 308 cm).
35 It is interesting that the pile wedding rug shown in plate 29 once belonged to Pope. I purchased it from his niece.
36 Edwards, 1953, p. 312.
37 Fakhr-i-Kuttab, pp. 165–66, 184–85.
38 Edwards, 1953, p. 128, pl. 120.
39 Fraser, 1840, vol. 1, pp. 112, 113.
40 See captions to plates 40, 41.
41 Fraser, 1840, vol. 1, pp. 112, 113.
42 This is the vast plateau of about one million square miles (2,500,000 square km), bound to the west and southwest by the Zagros Mountains; to the north by the Lesser Caucasus and Elburz ranges; and to the east and southeast by the Hindu Kush and the Suleiman Mountains. The central tableland averages about 3,500 feet (1,080 meters) in elevation and separates the Caspian Sea to the north from the Persian Gulf/Arabian Sea to the south.
43 An excellent source for listing of tribes and clans in Northern Kurdistan of the early nineteenth century is Jaba, 1860.
44 Polo, 1908, I.v and I.vi.
45 Heraldism, along with the art and paraphernalia of chivalry, was introduced by the Sarmatians – the cousins of the Scythians – into Western Europe, as far as Britain, in the fourth and fifth centuries AD. The same heraldic tradition was imparted by the Scythians to the Turko-Mongolian tribes, as the Scythians assimilated and vanished into the Turkic tribes. The Turkic and Mongolian clans did bring heraldic emblems with them into Kurdistan, but they too had just borrowed the idea (and the emblems) from the Scythians, as had the Kurds.

Notes

46 The last of the Shanbo rulers, Prince Nurullah Beg, was overthrown by the Ottoman army under the direction of Prussian officer and future general Helmut von Moltke in 1849. In 1870–71 the same von Moltke conquered Paris in the Franco-Prussian War.

47 Ptolemy, 1991, VI.i.

48 Maqrizi, 1440, I.i.9.

49 Sharafuddin of Bitlis, 1597, book II, chapter II.

50 Illustrated in Sharafuddin of Bitlis, 1597, p. 19.

51 Fraser, 1840.

52 Bryce, 1896, p. 463.

53 Wigram, 1914.

54 It can be difficult to follow the changes of city names that have occurred in Turkey; see Preface, page 7, for further explanation.

55 Polo, 1908, I.v. "*Boccasini*" may correspond to buckram.

56 Polo, 1908, I.ii.

57 Niebuhr, 1779, vol. II, p. 268.

58 Eagleton, 1988, p. 105.

59 An excellent history of the Khurasani Kurds written in Persian has been preserved in the library at the shrine in Meshad. In addition a four-volume treatise written by Kalim Allah Tavahhudi Awghazi (1981) tells the history in great detail. Most of the information in this section comes from these sources.

60 This main trunk of the Silk Road crossed the southern slopes of the Revand, from Meshad to the fabled Nishapor, and on to Sabzavar (Bayhaq), Damghan, Varamin, and Tehran (Ray); it then proceeded toward the Zagros crossing at Hamadan and Kirmanshah (see section on Southern Kurdistan).

61 In 1747 the same Za'faranlu generals assassinated Nadir Shah at Qochan.

62 An appreciable number of Dimili (Zaza)-speaking Kurds must have also arrived in Khurasan, as they did and do form a large linguistic minority in Turkish Kurdistan, but they have almost all been assimilated into the Kurmanji-speaking community in Khurasan.

63 Reade, 1991, p. 71.

64 Roaf, 1990, p. 49.

65 Frankel, 1979.

66 For example, Cuyler Young, 1967; Cuyler Young, 1977; Smith, 1971; Bridsell, 1957; and particularly Smith and Cuyler Young, 1982.

67 Reed, 1960, p. 128.

68 As well as the names of almost all the cities that we now recognize as Sumerian.

69 Khaldi > Kalli + the clan suffix kan > Khallikan.

70 For a concise treatment of this issue, see Izady, 1995.

71 What is known to the Western world as the River Indus is River Sindh to the natives of the Indian subcontinent. The southern third of Pakistan is still the realm of the Sindhi people and is known by that name. The name "India," meanwhile, is derived from Sindh through the Old Persian conversion of the initial letter *s* to *h* (a common practice in that language), to produce Hind. The ancient Greeks took up this Persian rendition of the name (i.e., Hind), and dropped the initial letter *h* (as is common in that language), coming up with name "Ind," plus the Greek suffix *us*, to get "Indus."

72 See Izady, 1994.

73 Polybius, *Histories*, V.52.

74 Strabo, *Geography*. V.xi.132–33; VII.xv.15.1.

75 Ptolemy, 1991, V.xii, VI.i–iii.

76 Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.xvii.

77 Xenophon, 1992.

78 In modern times many hypotheses have been advanced to connect the name Kurd to that of the ancient Hurrian Guti (Yasami, 1984) or Xenophon's "Kardukhoi" (1992). The name Guti survives today clearly in the name of the Kurdish clan of Judikan, who inhabit the heartland of the ancient Guti in southeastern Kurdistan. The "Kardukhoi," who subsequently came to be known as the Gordyene to classical authors, are none other than the predecessors of the modern Girdi clan of Kurds, who still reside exactly where the ancient Kardukhoi/Godyene were found. The name "Kurti/Kurd" seems likely to be of Aryan origin – one of the first, in fact, in Kurdistan – instead of the far more common Hurrian clan names encountered at all periods until today and including the Khardukhoi and Guti.

79 No "proof" beyond a single, vague phrase by a medieval Persian writer, Hamza Isfahani, has ever been produced to support the idea that "Kurd" was not an ethnic designator. Hamza states that "The Persians call the Daylamites the 'Kurds of Tabaristan', and the Bedouin the 'Kurds of Assyria'." What some medieval Persians did or did not think of other ethnic groups, and that only according to Hamza Isfahani, is hardly material to the Kurds and their ethnic history. Other, far more respected medieval historians such as Tabari, Ya'qubi, Mas'udi, Yaqut, Jayhani, Juwayni, Rawandi, Miskiwayh, and Mustawfi, array the Kurds alongside the Arabs and Turks as distinct ethnic groups.

80 Dio Cassius, LXXII.ix.34; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, VII.xii.1.







